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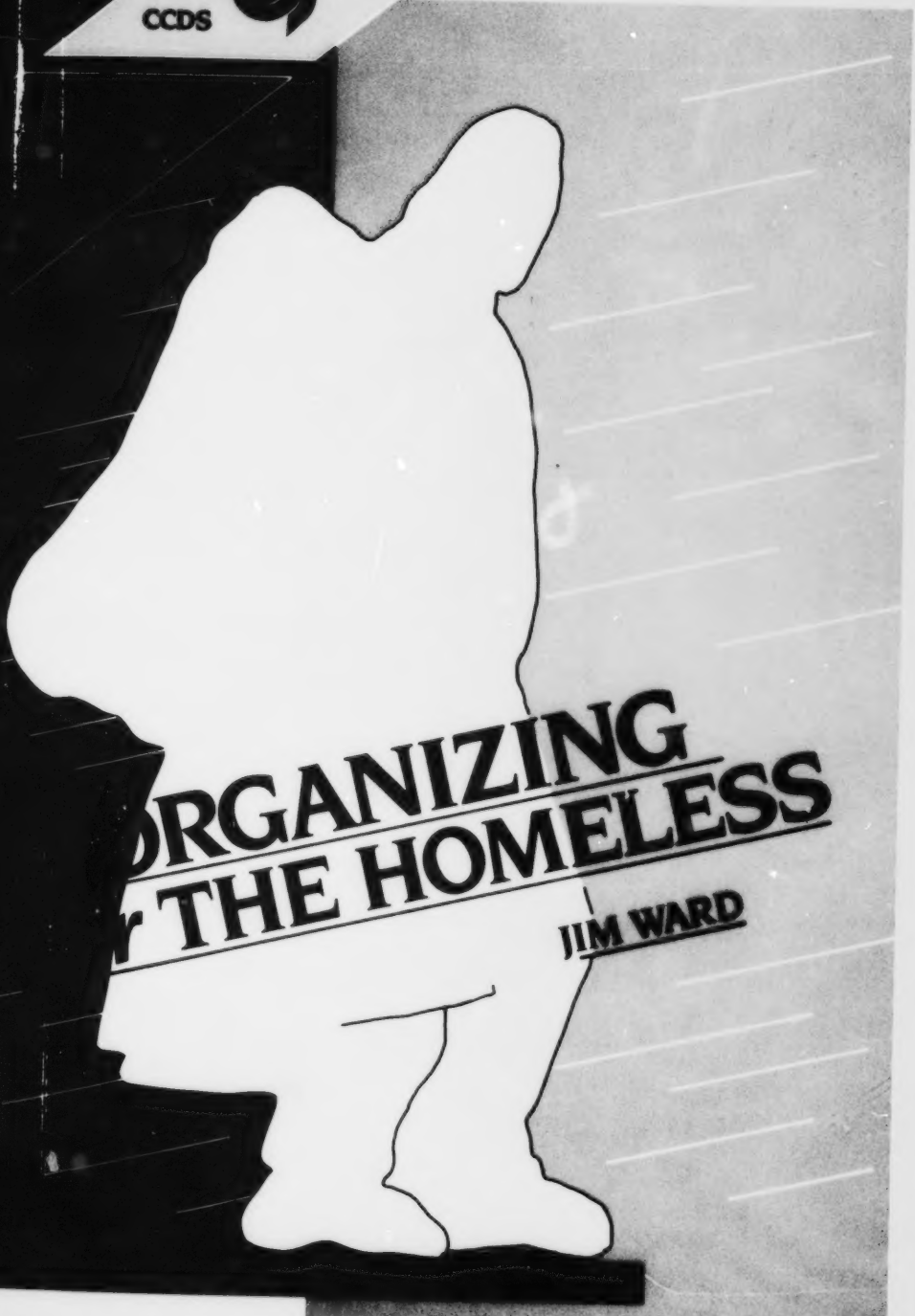

ORGANIZING for THE HOMELESS

JIM WARD

CANADIAN COUNCIL ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Organizing for the Homeless

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By **Jim Ward**

Canadian Council on Social Development
Ottawa/Montreal

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To John McKinnon

who died February 1, 1981, in a Sydney (Australia) park
10,000 miles away from his Toronto (Canada) home

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Foreword

Adequate shelter is one of the most basic of human needs. And yet, around the world, an estimated 100 million people have no place to live. They sleep in the streets, under bridges, in hallways, and in abandoned buildings. They migrate from one emergency shelter to another. They live out part or all of their lives without the security of having a place to call home.

In many countries, including Canada, housing for the poor and the homeless has been low on the political agenda. Faced with large deficits and slow economic growth, governments have been reducing rather than increasing their expenditures on housing and shelter related programs.

In 1987, the CCSD organized the first national study of homelessness in recent years. (Coincidentally, it was the third time in our history that we addressed the subject. Previous reports were published in 1939 and 1961.) From our research at the CCSD, we have concluded that any serious effort to combat homelessness in Canada must address the underlying causes as well as the symptoms. We need to redress shortcomings in social policies and legislation that:

- perpetuate or do little to alleviate poverty;
- allow deinstitutionalization of psychiatric patients to proceed without providing adequate community support;
- allow continuous shrinking of the supply of affordable housing.

It is also very clear to us that the homeless themselves want to, and must, share some of the responsibility for solving the problem of homelessness, both here and in other countries. This book provides assistance to those who want to ensure that the homeless are involved when plans and decisions are made.

Terrance Hunsley
Canadian Council on Social Development

Preface

This book is designed to act both as a resource and a stimulant to those who are interested in effectively organizing the homeless. I have thought of writing such a book for some years. It is appropriate that I did it in 1987, the United Nations International Year of Shelter for the Homeless.

Much was written about the homeless in 1987, which helped raise general public awareness about the problem, but did not make it go away. I still see many homeless on the downtown streets of every large city I visit in North America and elsewhere. In the city where I currently live, Toronto, Canada, there are thousands who are not sure of their next meal or of a bed for the night.

The underlying philosophy of this book is that some of the answers lie within the abilities of those thousands of homeless people. Systems can be changed from the top by those in power but it seldom happens until those at the bottom kick up a fuss in an organized way.

In my opinion, organizing among the homeless is not about bringing out thousands of protesters or storming the barricades. It is organizing around small-scale local projects or issues that helps put appropriate housing in place or forces bureaucrats to change harmful policies. It has fairly modest goals like setting up a drop-in centre where no one will be bothered and where people can belong to a group that cares. I come to this position after 20 years of living with, working with, and writing about the homeless in Canada, the United States, Britain and Australia.

The book is, in part, a "how to" book. It gives some concrete guidance about the nitty-gritty of organizing, such as: how to get people out to meetings and how to make things happen once they are there; how to deal with public sector bureaucrats and politicians; and how to create your own media. It is also a book that tries to get organizers and would-be organizers to think in broader philosophical and sociological terms than they might ordinarily. I have tried to do this by discussing some of the social theories that attempt to make sense of the social, political and economic complexities of our world, particularly as they relate to work with the homeless. I believe that effective work in organizing the homeless must have a conceptual base. Concepts alone are empty things unless they are applied to the reality of day-to-day events. The secret is to combine practice and theory in such a way that one can make sense of both. Theories and concepts alone are not very useful; on the other hand, practical efforts to organize the homeless that have no conceptual base are bound to fail.

Acknowledgements

I have intended to write this book for a long time now. When I worked with homeless people in Brisbane and Sydney back in the 1970s and early 1980s I used to say to myself, "I should get this down on paper." When I argued with a social service worker or a public servant about the "true causes" of homelessness I would often think, "What's needed is a book to compare and contrast some of these opposing views." When I woke up in a Bowery flophouse and wiped the bed bugs from my eyes, I thought, "This is worth a page or two."

Well here it is! But it's not just my book. It has grown out of knowing and talking to a lot of people in a lot of places. I've forgotten many of their names and I never knew the names of some of the people who had a large influence on the way I think about homelessness. I never knew the name of the old man who shared a night of stories and songs with me in a lock-up in downtown Sydney so many years ago. In one night he told me a lot of what I know about survival on the road. I never knew the name of the young woman on the Spanish beach who showed me where to sleep at night to avoid being picked up by the Guardia Civil. She probably saved me from some uncomfortable time as a guest of the Spanish government.

But there are a lot of names that I remember. The people whose names are listed below have had an important influence on the way I think about homelessness and thus they are, in some part, responsible for what is in this book.

Donna Ackley
Fred Allen
Dilin Baker
Wayne Baker
George Barnhardt
Lois Becker
Blackjack
Bill Bosworth
Sally Boyd
Norm Brennan
Johnno Brown
Sally Bryant
Nancy Doddington
Margot Francis
Tubby Ellard
Brenda Farge
Ron Fletcher
Ian Garrow
Beric German
Liz Greaves
Alison Guyton
Harvey
Helen Hemsol
Bill Henti
Elspeth Heyworth
Carmel Hili
Arthur Hunt
Ipswich Tommy
David Kidd
Kiwi Jack
Joan Kuyek
Ernie Lawrence
Brad Lennon
Victor Lundi
Ian McLaren
Bill McLeod
Ruth Mott
Marg Nault
Peter O'Brien
Larry Peterson
Alex Pope
Radar Ron
Joy Reid
David Reville
Tommy Robinson
Russian John
Doug Schwede
Bruce Shaw
Greg Smith
Snowy
Rick Thras
Jacques Tremblay
Moya Turner
Diane Urquhart
Wagga Jack
Peggy Ann Walpole
Paul Webb
Nikki Williams

My family — Cathy, Rebecca and Sarah — have been very much a part of my writing this book in a day-to-day sense: Cathy with her helpful criticism, and Rebecca and Sarah with their vibrant sparks of young life which prove to me daily that there are many reasons for joy in this world. When writing about a problem as serious as homelessness it is good to be reminded of joy. All three were great companions to a sometimes distant and grouchy writer.

I would also like to thank the Ontario Ministry of Housing, through its International Year of Shelter for the Homeless Secretariat, which provided funding towards the publication costs of this book. Terry Fagan and Ludovic D'Souza of the IYSH Secretariat have been particularly helpful and encouraging. The work of the staff at the Canadian Council on Social Development in Ottawa ensured that it all came together finally as a book.

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The Context of Homelessness

Homelessness is not an isolated social phenomenon. Rather, it is related to a wide range of socio-economic forces, an important point to understand if one is to be an effective organizer of the homeless and do anything effective about the problem.

Some years ago, in a study I carried out on the "skid rows" of Canada and the United States, I applied the concept of "skid row-dependent businesses" to a whole set of activities that depended on the skid row population for their survival. Such businesses included barber colleges, blood clinics, second-hand clothing stores, Christian missions and casual employment agencies. This concept can be useful in understanding that there are certain economic and social activities that may benefit from the extension of homelessness. It helps in identifying both positive and negative forces facing the organizer.

By knowing something about the size of the homeless problem, some of its major causes, and the ways in which some well-meant attempts at improving the situation often fail, the organizer can start from a position of strength. This chapter provides some of that information.

The Size of the Homeless Population

During 1987, designated as International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYSH) by the United Nations, many estimates were made of the number of homeless in the world. *These Homeless Times*, a newsletter from Portland, Oregon calling itself "A Voice for the Homeless Community" drew the following statement from UN Habitat data:

> More than one billion people — a quarter of the world's population — are either literally homeless, or live in extremely poor housing and unhealthy environments. About 100 million people have no shelter whatsoever; they sleep under bridges, in vacant lots, alleys and doorways. In the developing world, nearly 50 percent of the urban population live in slums and squatter settlements. In some cities the figure approaches 80 per cent.

These estimates are disturbingly large — 100 million people with no shelter whatsoever! The UN estimates that 20 million people in Latin America alone are homeless. The National Coalition for the Homeless in the United States found in 21 cities it surveyed in the fall of 1986 that the number of homeless had increased by an average of 25 per cent over the previous year.

In Canada the estimates vary from 10,000 homeless in Toronto alone to 10,000 in the whole country. A survey conducted by the Canadian Council on Social Development found 8,000 Canadians sleeping in temporary and emergency shelters on the night of January 22, 1987. The Council estimated that beds were provided for about 100,000 homeless and destitute people in Canada in 1986.

Despite genuine attempts to count accurately the homeless in different countries of the world, most are nothing more than wild estimates. This tends to obscure the actual magnitude of the problem. However, two things do seem clear: (i) the scale of the problem is far greater in the so-called developing world; and (ii) the problem is increasing in most parts of the world.

This book focuses exclusively on homelessness in the Western industrial world: thus little will be said about the vastness of the problem in the underdeveloped world. It can be stated that considerable structural similarities exist in the causes of homelessness in both situations. In both settings there are close links among powerlessness, poverty and homelessness. In both settings there is a close relationship between socio-economic structures and homelessness, particularly apparent in the link between fluctuating labour market demands and homelessness. Ms. Peta Qubeka of the Federation of Transvaal Women made this point very clear in her address to delegates of the Ottawa IYSH conference in September, 1987. She spoke of the development of the Bantustans, or "homelands," in South Africa, where black families are moved *en masse* to defined areas beyond the white-only centres. But the cities still depend heavily on labour imported from the Bantustans. Black workers must move from their Bantustan homes to the urban centres to get work. However, they are not allowed to become permanent residents of the cities. They are housed in temporary hostels. Thus for much of their working lives they are homeless. This is a clear illustration of the close connection between homelessness and labour market demands.

In North American, European, and Australian cities homelessness is also linked closely to labour market demands; but the links are less obvious than in

the South African case. In Toronto in the late 1980s many people are homeless because they have come to the city from regions of high unemployment. Toronto offers at least the possibility, if not the actuality, of work. Individuals with nothing to live on but the sale of their labour thus find themselves in situations where they must depend on emergency hostels for shelter.

The greater prominence of homelessness in all parts of the world is more than a reflection of increased publicity about the issue owing to the UN International Year of Shelter for the Homeless. Discussions with a wide range of people dealing with the homeless issue in the Western industrial world and statistics such as those presented above support the claim that homelessness is indeed a phenomenon on the rise.

Causes of the Increase in Homelessness

What are the major causes of the increasing number of homeless people? The most obvious causes are: shortage of affordable housing; changing labour market demands; the effects of the "homelessness industry;" and deinstitutionalization.

Shortage of Affordable Housing — In much of the western world over the past twenty years the production of what is known as "social housing" has fallen. (Social housing recognizes that housing is quite unlike other commodities. It also recognizes that characteristics such as fixed location, size, high cost of production, and use as an investment, make housing ill-suited to equitable distribution by means of market forces alone.) The present low level of production of social housing means that an increasing proportion of the population can not afford to acquire a commodity that is basic to survival.

In a discussion of the increasing difficulty low-income people have in obtaining housing in Canada, Allan Moscovitch writes: "If inequality in housing is to be changed, it will require a reorientation of policy towards the provision of housing in much the same way that primary and secondary education are provided — as a public service." (1981:343)

With the burgeoning of neo-conservatism in the Western world over the past 15 years, there has been an increasing tendency to leave housing provision to the play of market forces. Since the construction of luxury housing is more profitable than social housing, it is unlikely market forces will lead to any improvement in the availability of affordable shelter. Thus the shortage of public sector housing has been an important factor in increasing the level of homelessness.

Not only has there been a decrease in the construction of new affordable housing over recent years, there has also been substantial movement of existing housing out of the affordable range. The most obvious manifestation of this is the process of gentrification. Gentrification moves houses up market. Typically it takes housing that was previously affordable to lower class renters and moves

it into the middle class market. Whole downtown residential areas of cit
throughout the Western industrial world have felt the impact of gentrificati
In the downtowns of Toronto, Sydney, New York, and London, working cl
renters have been displaced by upwardly mobile, middle class professionals a
white collar workers. This influx has pushed the price of housing way beyo
the affordability range for those at the lower end of the working class. Hou
that were once home to a dozen single men in separate rooms, or, to two or th
working class families, are now home for professional couples with few chi
ren or none at all. The renovation of these houses not only moves them beyo
the price range of their previous occupants; it also inflates the price of all nei
bouring accommodation beyond their reach. Ironically, clusters of emerge
shelters are often located within a few blocks of these newly middle class r
dential areas. These shelters provide the most basic accommodation in insti
tional settings for the homeless men and women displaced by gentrification.

Changing Labour Market Demands — The example of the South Afri
Bantustans points to a situation in which homelessness is linked unmistaka
to labour market demands. The links are not so obvious in countries where
equallities are not so firmly institutionalized but they exist nonetheless. In
past, these links were more apparent than they are today. During the days of
classic "hobo," when homelessness was almost entirely a single-male pheno
enon, men moved considerable distances to sell their labour as crop harveste
timber cutters, railway builders, and so on. "Skid row" areas developed in
centres. These areas comprised a cluster of homeless-dependent activities su
as those discussed earlier (e.g., barber colleges, second-hand clothing stores, a
Christian missions). Most importantly, they were seen as locations where in
pensive labour could be found and recruited. Until the late 1960s the skid r
area of Sacramento, California was known as the Labor Market Area in recog
tion of this fact. Casual labour agencies clustered in these areas, so that trans
tions could be readily made between homeless people seeking work a
employers in the surrounding city and rural areas in need of labour. Since
work was sporadic there had to be a system for keeping a ready labour fo
close at hand at relatively little cost; hence the development of "emergency sh
ters" run by the Christian missions, and cheap rooming houses and hotels.

For the employer, or potential employer, this system worked well. The sin
homeless men were highly mobile and able to move from one skid row area
another with a minimum of cost to the system as a whole, or to each employ
Regions that were in need of large labour forces on a seasonal basis, such as
California cities, benefited particularly from a system that enabled such a h
level of labour mobility at such low cost. Since the workers generally had
family to support, wages could be kept to a minimum and housing facilities w
also kept to the bare minimum.

During periods of widespread unemployment, the skid row areas beca
"holding pens" for large numbers of unemployed, single men. The populat

of New York's Bowery exploded during the Great Depression of the late 1920s and early 1930s, when it became such a holding area for many of the region's unemployed. This function can be seen in the enormous growth in the average number of daily lodgings provided by the Bowery's Municipal Lodging House — from 375 per day in 1927 to 4,038 in 1932! The heavy and ongoing labour demands created by the Second World War reduced drastically this pressure on skid row housing. Once the war ended, the demand for casual and sporadic labour grew only gradually and varied considerably by region.

In the early 1970s I spent considerable time living on, and studying, six of the larger skid rows in the United States and Canada. These were in Baltimore, Washington D.C., New York, Toronto, Seattle and Sacramento. The skid row areas broke roughly into two groups. Sacramento, Seattle and Toronto were still relatively active labour market areas, since they were located near regions with high seasonal labour demands. By contrast, the Bowery, Baltimore and Washington D.C. served largely as long-term welfare housing systems, where individuals worked sporadically, moving furniture, shovelling snow, delivering pamphlets, etc. In the case of the Bowery, people washed dishes during the summer in upstate New York resort areas.

With the rapid decline in demand for casual and seasonal labour since the early 1970s, even the "economically active" areas have moved more towards a long-term welfare housing situation. This fact, coupled with the pressure on housing caused by gentrification, has changed radically the nature of housing. The men who inhabited the skid rows up until fifteen years ago were not so homeless as their modern counterparts. Those men in previous years certainly did not have luxury accommodation in their dirty flophouses or bunks in a Salvation Army hostel. But the modern homeless population of the Western world (including men, women and children) are likely to have even fewer choices. The hostels may be a little cleaner than they once were but there are no alternatives, not even bug-ridden beds in flophouses. In this sense, the homeless of today are more truly homeless. But now, as then, homelessness is more than a lack of shelter: it is powerlessness and lack of control over one's life. As always, these circumstances are linked closely to the demands of the labour market. The homeless are considered to be human resources not worth developing. Together with an increasingly large part of populations of Western industrialized countries they are being marginalized to the very edge of society. Their labour is no longer sought in primary sector industries. What jobs are to be found are in the most poorly paid parts of the service sector. These people compete, often unsuccessfully, for dishwashing jobs that pay the minimum wage or less. They walk countless miles a day delivering handbills to suburban households for a few dollars. They wait hopefully for a few hours work at some downtown street corner where small-time contractors come each day with odd jobs. But the likelihood of picking up any really worthwhile compensation is virtually nil.

For the increasing population of homeless women, particularly those who have been married, the experience is somewhat different. It is difficult to link their homelessness directly to changing labour market demands rather than to a decision to end an intolerable marital situation. However, although I have not seen any research on the class backgrounds of homeless women, I would guess that they tend to come primarily from the working class and that they have fewer skills to sell on the labour market than their middle class sisters in similar marital situations.

Effects of the "Homelessness Industry" — In 1987 the Ontario Ministry of Housing funded (through its specially created International Year of Shelter for the Homeless Secretariat) a series of six workshops to discuss the issue of homelessness. The workshops were attended by 794 people, many of whom listed social service agencies as a major obstacle to improving conditions for the homeless. Social service agencies have become a major component of the homelessness industry. Social workers and other staff work to provide the homeless with shelter, food, counselling, leisure space, etc. With the growth of the social service system, generally more services have become available to the homeless. Sometimes the service to the homeless is only one among many activities the agency carries out. I was executive director of one such agency in downtown Toronto for three years. The agency, Dixon Hall, offered emergency shelter, assistance with welfare issues, advocacy in working with the public sector bureaucracy, assistance in moving towards long-term housing, and counselling to homeless men. In addition, the agency offered a whole range of services to other local low-income residents, such as skills training, music lessons, home help services, transportation, etc. Other social service agencies in the voluntary and public sector are devoted solely to work with the homeless. The focus may be providing emergency shelter, as in the case of hostels, or treating a behavioural condition such as alcoholism. In the case of the latter agencies, work with the homeless comprises everything they do. The homeless are their *raison d'être*. The Community Services Department of Metropolitan Toronto lists over 200 local agencies in its 1985 directory, *Reaching Out: Services for Persons who are Homeless or Living Marginally*. Fifty-seven of these agencies have the homeless as their core "market population." Although most of the staff at these agencies mean well and intend to make life more bearable for homeless people, the outcome may not necessarily be particularly beneficial to the homeless.

I interviewed recently a number of individuals who have been directly or indirectly involved in organizing the homeless in Canada. A question I asked was, "What do you see as the major barriers to effective organizing among the homeless?" Several people's answer was, "The social service agencies."

A concept that helps in understanding why social service agencies may actually worsen the situation for the homeless comes from two unlikely sources. In *Deschooling Society*, Ivan Illich argues that an important characteristic of institutions is that they do the opposite of what they purport to do. As an example, Il-

lich points to jails. Jails are supposed to turn criminals into law-abiding citizens but what they actually do is turn law-abiding citizens into criminals. In *How to Survive in Your Native Land*, James Herndon, an American schoolteacher, makes a similar point. He argues that the institutional obsession for survival is linked closely with the tendency for institutions to do the opposite of what they claim to do. He gives the example of a savings bank, which, he states, would soon go broke if it could not convince its customers not to save. Herndon defines an institution as "a place to do things where those things will not be done." If we apply this concept to some social agencies, they may actually be exacerbating the problem of the homeless.

The most obvious case where social agencies work against their stated purpose is that of hostels and emergency shelters. (Here we must exclude the women's shelters run by women with a feminist ideology.) The hostel or emergency shelter response to homelessness can best be characterized as a warehousing rather than a housing response. It becomes a barrier to the provision of real housing in three ways. (i) Because of their ignorance about the actual poor living arrangements and conditions in most hostels (e.g., dormitory style living, lack of privacy, threat to safety), the general public tends to see hostels as an adequate and appropriate response to homelessness. (Admittedly, they are better than being left to freeze to death in the street.) More appropriate alternatives such as the provision of **real** housing are therefore seen as a less urgent need. The problem has, by most accounts, been dealt with. Those who were homeless now have a "home." (ii) The fact that hostel accommodation is provided by the public and voluntary sectors reinforces the notion that the homeless cannot be provided for by the private sector any more. The idea that provision of shelter is a state responsibility, done out of a sense of charity, becomes widely accepted. Should a homeless person dare to complain about his or her accommodation, he or she would be considered ungrateful. (iii) Access to a bed in a hostel can hardly be considered as equal to access to a home. A home is where the individual gains strength to do battle with the world each day. It is a place to recharge one's psychological batteries. Living in a hostel removes the distinction between "in here" and "out there." It is all "out there." A hostel is little more than a public bed for eight or ten hours a day. The hostel dweller is forced to leave the building each morning and is not admitted again until the evening. During the day, he or she is supposed to stay out on the streets — in the employment agencies and in personnel departments of factories and offices searching for a job that may not exist. The whole of life is lived in public, whether it be on the streets, in parks or in a dormitory. There is no place of one's own that can be called "home." An extended period of living in such circumstances is enough to make anyone give up on the chances of a better life. From an organizer's point of view, the hostel life does little to inculcate people with a desire to work together to better their situation.

Hostels are the most obvious example of social agencies doing the opposite of what they purport to do. Rather than decrease homelessness they may actu-

ally increase its likelihood. In recent years many social agencies serving the homeless have become aware of these problems and have been active in reversing the trend. In Toronto a group of social agencies, working under the umbrella of the Single Displaced Persons Project, has recognized the need to work closely with the homeless to ensure that their efforts really do improve the situation. Organizers need to know the difference between social agencies that really do do what they purport to do and those that don't. They need to work together with the former in the fight against homelessness and they need to work to change the approaches of the latter.

Deinstitutionalization — Since the 1960s a major shift has occurred in the way psychiatric patients (a problematic phrase that is used here for the purpose of discussion) are dealt with. In the hundred or so years before the 1960s, the normal practice was to confine such people in institutions. The belief was that by isolating them from society two major goals could be more readily achieved: patients were kept safe from harm, and from harming others; and the treatments had more opportunity to take effect.

The different views on exactly why the large psychiatric institutions were wound down so rapidly can be divided roughly into two camps: the sanguine and the radical. The sanguine view proposes that deinstitutionalization came about largely because of a realization that mental asylums were harmful to the patients that resided in them. Critics argued that the institutions themselves made people who were quite sane before being admitted become crazy. Two of the most influential works that advanced this argument were Erving Goffman's *Asylums* and Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*. The so-called psychotropic (acting on the mind) drug revolution occurred at about the same time that the critique of asylums was being developed. Drugs made it possible to put hitherto "crazy" people back into the community where they would act like "normal" people, so long as they received their drug treatment.

The radical view argues that deinstitutionalization is simply a cost-cutting measure taken by the state at a time when labour costs in the mental asylums were escalating rapidly because of increased unionization, and when the physical plant, dating from around the turn of the twentieth century during the "mental asylum boom," was deteriorating rapidly and becoming costly to repair or replace. Edmund Scull's *Decarceration: Community Treatment and the Deviant* is probably the most eloquently argued statement of this point of view.

The truth probably lies somewhere between the sanguine and the radical views. No matter which view one adopts, there is general agreement that the community mental health systems that were supposed to replace the psychiatric institutions have only been partially developed. Health ministries have generally been negligent in providing the kind of community health services that would have provided the same level of "care" to psychiatric patients as they had experienced in the institutional environment. In many instances, the whole con-

cept of "community health care" turns out to be a euphemism for total neglect. Certainly many psychiatric patients who use emergency shelters and hostels for the homeless have been left to fend largely for themselves. It is also apparent that the psychiatric industry is not decreasing in size but simply in nature. In *The Transfer of Care: Psychiatric Deinstitutionalization and its Aftermath*, author Phil Brown argues that there has been a rapid development of a new community sector of the psychiatric industry which includes nursing homes and boarding homes.

For our purposes, it is important to point out that psychiatric patients who use facilities for the homeless should be considered as part of the homeless population. They likely come from the same class background and share similar experiences. The basic difference between the ordinary homeless and former patients is that the latter group have been labelled as "psychiatric patients."

An initial contact with a psychiatrist may brand an individual as an "inadequate personality," a schizophrenic, or as suffering from some other mental health condition. Soon after this first contact, treatment of some sort may begin, more often than not involving a mood-altering drug.

The individual is now labelled as a consumer of psychiatric services, a fact that may alter radically the course of that individual's life. If the person is powerless, then the label is liable to stick and he or she may be known indefinitely as an "ex-psychiatric patient." As with other labels, such as "alcoholic," the real danger to self-determination is that an individual may fully accept the label and define him or herself in this way when dealing with the world. This is an extremely important point for organizers, if they are to see such labelled individuals as being no different from their homeless brothers and sisters. To segregate them according to their brush with psychiatry is to accept a false definition of reality. For an organizer of the homeless, this is one of the major challenges to face. It requires considerable patience and courage to deny an accepted truth, particularly when it is also accepted by the labelled person.

To reiterate, I am not suggesting that the psychiatrically labelled come from a different part of the population than the homeless generally, but that the closing of large mental asylums has decreased the number of sheltered spaces available to the homeless population. Overall, this may not be a bad thing. From an organizational perspective, so-called community health approaches have at least provided the opportunity for what was previously an artificially segregated population to work together to improve their situation. This fact is well understood by a Toronto-based self-help group called "On Our Own." Their organizing efforts, which include community economic development projects and the production of a sophisticated newsletter, *Phoenix Rising: The Voice of the Psychiatrized*, recognize the false boundary drawn between the labelled and the non-labelled.

Homeless Women and Homeless Men — While talking to residents of a women's shelter in downtown Toronto recently, I was suddenly struck by a different atmosphere there from that of most men's hostels and shelters. The women's shelter seemed like a friendly place. There were no notices on the wall prohibiting this or that activity, nor was there any of the authoritarianism one feels in many of the homeless men's agencies. There are, of course, authoritarian, charity-oriented shelters for homeless women just as there are non-hierarchical, empowering shelters for homeless men, but these are the exception rather than the rule. What accounts for this situation?

In 1983 the Single Displaced Persons Project, a Toronto network of social agency personnel deeply involved in the issue of homelessness, developed two "thought pieces" on housing for the homeless. The first of these, *The Case for Long-Term, Supportive Housing*, argued against the use of temporary hostels as a way of dealing with the housing shortage for the homeless. During the development of this paper, there had been considerable discussion of the difference between men's and women's hostels. The former were seen in an almost exclusively negative light. The latter were characterized as either very supportive places that provided a necessary transition period in homeless women's lives or as authoritarian, harmful places. The main point of the discussion was that there were some basic differences between men's and women's hostels, just as there were basic differences in the experiences of homeless men and women.

A second "thought piece," *Hostels and Homelessness*, looked particularly at these issues. Part of the argument advanced in this paper was that many women's shelters operate within an ideological framework that sees the condition of homelessness as a structural problem:

> In exploring the similarities and differences between men's and women's hostels we discovered that women's hostels, like Nellies, began with a commitment to develop the services as a right, a clear perception that women using the services are victims of larger social forces and an understanding of the kind of nurturing and support needed in such a crisis. Traditionally, men's hostels have functioned on different assumptions — that the service is a charity to losers and failures who deserve only minimal support and amenities.

The Single Displaced Persons Project people hit on an essential point. Women who help homeless women to organize have recognized the structural nature of homelessness and have worked to provide services that do battle with these structural forces. This helps the homeless women they work with to see that their problems are not primarily individual and it promotes greater possibilities for effective group action.

The socialization process experienced by girls is very different from that experienced by boys and may have a bearing on the contrasting atmospheres of

women's and men's shelters. In the former, the atmosphere is gentle, supportive and trusting: the latter is pervaded by an air of authoritarianism, potential violence and mistrust.

In most cases of "family breakdown," women assume responsibility for the children. This broadening of responsibility from the individual to a group (the woman, plus her children) gives a homeless woman an urgent sense that she is living for more than herself and has an essential responsibility for the lives of others.

Men are more likely to see their homelessness in individual terms; they have **reduced themselves** to a marginal place in a dog-eat-dog society. Women, by contrast, have **been reduced** to this position and they are more likely than men to work with others in similar situations and to be indefatigable on behalf of their children.

The causes of homelessness for men and women also tend to be different. For men, the causes are almost entirely economic. Homelessness is simply a manifestation of class position like poverty and powerlessness. Although apocryphal tales of homeless men who used to be lawyers, accountants, university professors, etc. are frequently featured in the media — particularly around Christmas time — the fact is that virtually all homeless men were born at the bottom end of the working class and have remained there. Thus, their class position is the major cause of their homelessness.

By contrast, the causes of homelessness for women tend more often to be linked to what is often euphemistically referred to as "family breakdown," i.e., a situation within a particular family has become untenable. In the most obvious cases, the woman is a victim of wife battering, and has fled the husband, which has also meant leaving the home. She has now become homeless. The woman may be working class, but not necessarily so; male domination and abuse crosses class lines. Male domination, while it is a major cause of homelessness for women, is not the only cause. Many women are homeless because of their class position. For example, the so-called "bag ladies" (a horrible and derogatory term) are homeless for many of the same economic reasons as their male counterparts. They may never have experienced explicit male domination as wives, although they may have experienced it as daughters and sisters.

At a one-day seminar on homelessness in Brisbane in 1979, Ms. Rae Kempis of the Women's Community Aid Association spoke eloquently about some of the important differences between women and men with respect to both the situations and causes of their homelessness. Here is part of the text of that address:

> Definition of "homeless?" — many persons who live in a house are homeless. A **home** is a place where those who live together accept responsibility, or are given support and have a certain amount of privacy and autonomy.

What do you and I know about survival as a "homeless person?"

The depth of this despair was brought to my attention recently by a young woman who said, "I'd rather have a home, a permanent place to live and eat. I can get food even if I have to steal it, but not having a secure place to keep my few possessions and a place to sleep really scares me."

For most of us who speak on behalf of Homeless Persons our understanding of the term "homeless" has changed over the years as has our knowledge of who is homeless. We attend meetings, write papers, give interviews to the media, lobby governments but the "homeless" are still with us in ever increasing numbers. Those of us who work in this area come to dread the sound of the phone late at night and weekends proving that once again a place has to be found to cope with an emergency situation.

The background for this paper is my personal experience. Twenty-five years ago, I had to make a choice: to leave a violent domestic situation with two small children and pregnant or continue to "cover up" from relatives and friends the reality of my life.

The four years I have worked at Women's House has added to my personal and political understanding of what it means to be "homeless and houseless," so that I speak with some real understanding of the reality that so many women try to cope with, often because they do not think they have any alternatives — and indeed the alternatives are limited.

Women, as mothers dependent on a male breadwinner without economic independent status, are caught in a double bind situation. They must choose to remain "homeless" within an intolerable domestic situation or become "houseless" in the hope that they will regain sanity, self-respect and autonomy as persons — women-headed households make up the largest group in poverty.

Since 1974 with the emergence of feminist refuges offering temporary crisis accommodation, information to women in such areas as law, health, pensions and housing changes have occurred in many more traditional agencies who meet the ever increasing needs of homeless women and children.

The recognition of women as persons who can make and carry out decisions on an "informed" basis must be part of the long and often painful process for those women who have been dependent on the male provider/protector for decision- making that vitally affects the

> lifestyle of the other members of the family — the dependents — wife and children.
>
> The pressures that contribute to the day-to-day lives of many men are often intolerable, e.g. no job satisfaction, the real threat of unemployment, and the stereotyped male image of what a "man's" role is in relation to home and family, and this contributes to tensions and dissatisfaction. In my lifetime, I have observed the ever increasing pressures that consumerism — keeping up with the Jones" it used to be called — contributes to the stresses of life for many families. The "expectations" encouraged by clever advertisements at such times as Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day and birthdays, the fact that many women do try to compensate for their dissatisfaction and misery by purchasing (on hire purchase)* goods for both the home and children perpetrates a vicious cycle of stress.
>
> The Australian myth — a home and garden for every hard working **deserving** family as basic to the Australian way of life can no longer be perpetrated given the reality of the housing conditions of so many.

This statement brings alive much of the difference between homelessness for men and for women. The causal factors tend to be different and the experience of homelessness itself is somewhat different. It tends to be a less self-oriented experience for women because there is the need to think of the children in many cases. The different experience, combined with the higher level of awareness among women of the structural nature of the problem provides better opportunities for successful organizing.

In *Hostels and Homelessness,* (the paper by the Single Displaced Persons Project), the point is made that women's hostels in Toronto are funded at a per capita level that is six times higher than that for men's hostels. The results of this higher level of funding show up in higher staff-to-user ratios, in smaller-scale, less institutionalized settings, and in less stark physical surroundings. A major reason for the higher level of funding for such hostels is undoubtedly the fact that women are more organized, work as better advocates on behalf of their sisters and feel a greater sense of responsibility for providing more than a basic level of services for those sisters. However, I feel there is also another important dynamic force at work and this is the guilt felt by male-dominated institutions that make funding decisions. No guilt is felt about the appallingly low level of services available to homeless men. The attitude toward men is that it is their fault that they are homeless; they simply have to go out and get a job. Women are more readily seen to have been rendered homeless by a male. Those supporting the cause of homeless women can make this guilt work for them in the form of relatively substantial funding support.

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*time-payment plans

The feminist movement, the different causes, the differing socialization experiences and a somewhat guilty set of male-dominated funding sources all operate together to make male homelessness and female homelessness fundamentally different.

From an organizing perspective, in recent times at least, there have been greater successes with homeless women, largely because of the above phenomena. It seems to me that substantial gains could be made by bringing homeless women and homeless men back together again, with the women in a leadership role. They have much to teach the men. The institutional separation of homeless men and homeless women makes this a difficult project, but it is one that organizers need to look at seriously. The physical locations that might be most appropriate to begin this effort are the drop-in centres where homeless men and women mix freely. The major danger to watch for is that men do not slip into traditional dominating positions, something for which they are particularly unsuited but which the socialization experiences of both men and women encourage.

Although it is difficult to measure the size of the homeless population, there does seem to be some agreement that it is on the increase. In the developing world, the size of the estimates is staggering — millions rather than thousands are talked about. In the Western industrialized world, the numbers may be far lower but the causes are not substantially different. In both situations, there are close connections between the socio-economic forces and the level of homelessness. In South Africa, the creation of Bantustans — a political action — and the consequent demand for low-cost labour in areas outside the Bantustans — an economic demand — are very concrete causes of homelessness. In Brazil, the collapse of rural economies and the maintenance of power by the few are both causal factors in the creation of high levels of homelessness. In the United States, Canada and Australia, the decreased demand for unskilled labour and the lack of affordable housing, within the reach of low income people are both important causal factors. For homeless women, intolerable family situations often constitute a major causal factor. Men and women appear to deal differently with the problem and agencies that are sex-specific tend to deal with the problem in different ways.

The organizer needs to have a thorough understanding of the importance of causal factors in creating and maintaining homelessness. It is not sufficient to see homelessness simply as "houselessness." It must be seen as a manifestation of powerlessness that can only be effectively attacked by the building of power among the homeless.

2

Organizing the Homeless

The homeless are often believed to be an impossible group to organize, owing to the uncertain circumstances in which they live. Organizing the homeless can provoke questions like, "How can we get them out to meetings when they don't know where they're going to be sleeping tonight?" and comments like, "We sometimes get a person who is willing to lead, but then gets a job and we're back to square one again." In fact, groups such as the homeless simply take extra effort and ingenuity to organize.

This chapter attempts to simplify the task by providing organizers with a step-by-step method of preparing themselves to do the job and get the job done. The chapter takes organizers through a process of questioning their attitudes to the homeless. It then provides some insight into better understanding the homeless. What are their values? What makes them tick? What kind of language do they use? The chapter points out how essential it is to recognize strengths that can be drawn from people's experiences. The skills and knowledge available from the homeless themselves can be used to further their aims, in areas such as developing media outlets and embarking upon research efforts.

Once these methods are understood, the organizer can be more effective in drawing people to meetings, making meetings work, and helping to turn decisions into concrete actions. Together with Chapters 3 and 4, this chapter makes up the bulk of the "how to" section of the book.

Adopting the Right Attitudes

Recognizing the Structural Nature of the Problem — The previous section emphasized that homelessness is a structural problem **rather than problems of individuals**, which, although it may seem a simple point, nonetheless is one of vital importance. The difficult thing about remembering it is that the organizer deals every day with individuals who arrive late at meetings, or not at all, and often fail to keep promises. So the organizer slips into a "blame the individual" attitude and often becomes discouraged. But, if one stops to reflect, one realizes that these people often behave in these ways for reasons beyond their control.

Few organizers of the homeless today fail to recognize that the major reason people are without homes is that there are not enough houses available to people on low incomes. Thus, the shortage of affordable housing — the most direct link to homelessness — is a structural problem. Unfortunately, however, there are still some people who work with the homeless who persist in seeing it as an individual problem whose solution, therefore, involves "treatment" of the individual. In its most extreme form, this takes the shape of seeing homelessness as an illness. (I recall a meeting in Sydney of social service agencies to discuss the increasing incidence of homelessness in that city. One well-known physician proposed, quite seriously, that homelessness should be seen as a disease and dealt with through individual treatment.)

Effective organizers do recognize, however, that the pressures and exigencies of life as a homeless person have detrimental effects on people, one of the most obvious being a lack of self-confidence and lowering of self-esteem. It is the organizer's task to recognize this lack of confidence without locating its source in the individual, but rather in the individual's circumstances. One of the secrets of effective organizing among the homeless is to re-establish self-confidence and provide opportunities for the emergence of dormant skills.

A major attitudinal error for organizers to make is to put themselves above the homeless people with whom they work. By some socio-economic measures, the organizer is likely "above" homeless people. But, in terms of intrinsic worth, the organizer and the homeless are at the same level. An organizer must do more than pay lip service to the principle of equality; he or she must believe it. Holding this belief can help prevent organizers from slipping into deadly attitudinal enemies of organizing, such as treating services for the homeless as charity, and other paternalistic behaviour.

Charity — Charitable causes have a long history of encouraging the idea that certain people should be "kept in their places." The implication is that some people's place is below that of those who really call the shots. Charity boosts those who dispense it by assuaging their guilt and confirming their position of total control. Many of the structures that have been developed to "help" the homeless are built on this notion of charity. People are exhorted to "give to char-

ity" by professional charity dispensers like the United Way and the Salvation Army. In some respects, the real beneficiaries of charity are the charity-dispensing organizations since they ensure that recipients are "kept in their place" and remain "ever grateful" for what they have received.

Charity, then, has no place in the attitudinal armoury of organizers of the homeless. Nor does its companion, the patronizing approach, which treats the homeless person like a child who is too immature to make important decisions. It puts a sickly smile on the face of the organizer who pretends to suffer patiently the homeless person's explanation of his or her problems in the world.

Paternalism — Paternalism is an attitude that the women's movement has attacked as an unthinking belief in male superiority and authority. But paternalism exists within and across the sexes. The male organizer's parternalistic approach gives the male homeless person little credit for being able to identify and solve his own problems. The paternalist says: "I think this might work better. Have you thought of trying it?"

Messianic Attitudes — A messianic attitude is also harmful. It frightens people away when an organizer is too convinced about being right. There are many people whose ideas may conflict with an organizer's own but are still worth a hearing. A messianic attitude closes the mind of an organizer to many worthwhile ideas.

Class Background — Class background can have a profound effect on the ability of an organizer to adopt an effective attitude for working with the homeless. The middle or upper middle background of an organizer may make it difficult to resist attitudes associated with charity and paternalism. An organizer with working class origins has to remember that the homeless people he or she works with have similar backgrounds. Some working class organizers fall into the trap of feeling that because they are not homeless they are somehow better. Organizers have only their skills as organizers to offer as examples of people who have "made it."

All organizers, no matter what their class background, need to examine thoroughly their feelings about the homeless and must ask themselves if they are "do-gooders" or people with a mission. Good organizing does not mix well with charity, indignant rage, or paternalism.

The Need for Humour — An essential attitudinal ingredient for the successful organizer is a good sense of humour. It is important to be able to laugh at one's self and with others. Some situations are quite ridiculous and the appropriate response may be a good hearty laugh. An unremittingly serious approach to organizing can make an organizer a difficult person to be around. Arthur Koestler saw humour as one of the most creative aspects of humanity. Work at it, and smile!

A Willingness to Let Go — Organizers must be willing to "let go" of the leadership when the time is ripe. They must resist the temptation to remain in the centre of things. The organizer builds up responsible leadership within a group which then works with the group to make decisions. An organizer unwilling to let go at the appropriate moment is less an organizer than a manipulator using others for the purpose of self-aggrandisement. It can also be said that organizers with their own agendas are less organizers than budding politicians. There is nothing wrong with engaging in politics as long as one is honest about it. The budding politician who masquerades as an organizer can do much damage to organizing efforts. Furthermore, a negative experience with a would-be politician will make homeless people suspicious of genuine organizers who come afterwards.

Patience — Patience, seen as a virtue generally, is essential for effective organizing among the homeless. Patience means taking the time to develop processes so that the homeless themselves are making real decisions, having real input into policies and programs that effect them, or, better yet, designing those policies and programs. In everyday terms, patience requires understanding when people miss meetings; it means letting a meeting take torturous twists before getting back on track; it may mean allowing time for the expression of conflicting opinions and allowing inarticulate people to flex their speaking capabilities. (People who are seldom asked to air their views and opinions can lose the ability to express themselves effectively. Organizers must help provide them with the opportunities.)

Valuing Homeless People — Possibly the most important attitude for the effective organizer among the homeless is a genuine ability to value the homeless as people with a great deal to offer. This attitude should not be expressed in any patronizing way. Rather, it should reflect a belief held strongly that the homeless, like most people, have interesting, worthwhile things to say and positive contributions to make.

This matter of respecting the homeless cannot be taken lightly. It is truly difficult for organizers to rid themselves entirely of the pervasive view of the homeless as "losers" with little to contribute, who need only kindness and charity. Similar attitudinal problems can arise among homeless people who become organizers themselves. Oddly enough, they have difficulty believing that those still in the ranks of the homeless are as worthwhile as themselves.

Understanding Value Systems

An organizer should resist temptations to foist a set of values upon the homeless, which can lead to disaster and disillusionment. Patience is necessary in this area as in others. Organizers must take time to learn about, and feel comfortable with, value systems among the homeless.

The Conservatism of the Working Class — Organizers seeking to radicalize working class groups have often foundered on the inherent conservatism of the groups. (Che Guevarra was once chastised by a Bolivian peasant for disturbing the peace of his goats with gunfire.) At first blush the working class often appears staunchly conservative. There are those in this class who read right-wing papers and vote conservative political parties into power. The conservatism of the working class is manifested particularly strongly among the homeless. So the organizer has to deal with an inherent suspicion of change. Patient work is required to gain the trust of the homeless, to convince them of the possibility of bettering their world and enjoying the same opportunities open to others. They must also be convinced of the need for their input into designing and bringing about this better world.

Traditional Sex Roles — An obvious manifestation of conservatism among the homeless is adherence to traditional sex roles. The men tend to see themselves as protectors of womenfolk and, curious though it may seem, as breadwinners. There is little tolerance for deviance from traditional sexual roles in that part of the homeless population that is male dominated. However, the female homeless population that is separated from the male-dominated homeless population often has very different attitudes to sex roles. Women have often been radicalized by bad experiences with males; indeed these experiences may be the cause of their homelessness. Women who have spent time in shelters for women escaping bad relationships are likely to question traditional male domination and female subordination.

Thus, owing partly to segregation of the sexes in many homeless institutions, we have a situation of women developing a critical approach to traditional sex roles and men being further confirmed in their uncritical approach. As the segregated females become more radicalized, the segregated males become more conservative. However, it is important to be aware that women who live in the **same** physical setting as homeless men are likely to be just as conservative as the men.

These attitudes about sex roles have clear implications for the organizer among the homeless. He or she should be conscious of differences in attitudes and encourage the radical views of the segregated females to cross the lines into the milieu of segregated males and the homeless females who live among them.

The Work Ethic Orientation — A central component of a conservative approach to the world is the work ethic. The conservative approach sees work as probably the central fact of life. Ironically, the homeless population, having the worst jobs and being the most vulnerable to unemployment, also tends to regard work as central. Much of the daily activity of the homeless person is spent in a fruitless search for work, doing unrewarding (spiritually and materially) work, or convincing an agency person or public servant that one's main purpose in life is to get a job. Even the enlightened few among the homeless — who recognize the futility of searching endlessly for rotten jobs — find it difficult to be honest.

They too have to convince people that they want a job more than anything in the world. However, many of the enlightened homeless have developed ways of getting by reasonably well, albeit at a very low material level.

It is in the sphere of work that debates about whether there is an element of choice in becoming homeless are most relevant. Some conservative, middle-class individuals say that a person is homeless by choice and could choose to be something else. These people may be partly correct in this view, but only with respect to the small group of enlightened homeless people who regard the endless job hunt as futile. These people recognize that if they were to become regular workers (a possibility only in good economic times) they could become worse off than in their present state of being homeless. Their range of choice is narrow. It is not a choice between having a well-paid, respected job and having a life of homelessness on the margins of society. Rather it is a choice between a poorly paid, unrewarding job that allows one to purchase no more than third-rate accommodation, and being homeless without a job but with a little more self-esteem left intact.

A Question of Honour — There is a strong tradition of honour among the homeless that may not look like honour to the middle class observer, but honour it is nonetheless. It is the kind of honour that commits one to repay debts (borrowing is an important part of the homeless lifestyle), to stand by a friend in need, to share and help each other rather than compete. It is an honour that allows confidences to be shared between friends in the knowledge that the secret will be respected. The successful organizer learns to respect this tradition of honour and to act according to the code. An organizer who ignores the subtleties of the code is likely to fail.

Acceptance of the Individualistic Explanation — The homeless person tends to accept the individualistic explanation for his position in society. Despite all evidence to the contrary, the homeless are likely to blame themselves for being at the bottom. This owes partly to brushes with personnel in agencies that provide services to the homeless. By and large, their approach is to attribute homelessness to individual failure. Segregated homeless women are more likely to see their position from a structural perspective. Again, the organizer should look to the segregated women as allies in replacing the segregated men's individualistic perspective with a structural perspective.

The acceptance by the homeless of the individualistic explanation is probably the major block to effective organizing. It leads to individualistic solutions such as: "I should get off my butt and do something about it." These proposals usually lead only to increased self-dislike. In our work at the Station in Sydney, this retreat to individualism blocked us time and again. Organizers have to work particularly hard with the homeless to show that the causes of their situation are almost entirely structural. It needs to be pointed out repeatedly that people higher up the social ladders also make mistakes, but owing to their social status never

spend a night in a hostel, on the street, or in jail. A useful method of breaking the individualist block is to develop group projects in which people can build something together.

Authoritarianism — Along with a belief in the individualistic explanation comes a tendency toward authoritarianism. Homeless people tend to be particularly susceptible to wielding authority over their fellow homeless whenever the opportunity arises. This phenomenon can be seen most clearly when a homeless person is given a task such as sweeping up, washing dishes, or locking up at a hostel or drop-in centre. Before long, the person will be pushing people around, now regarding former cohorts as relatively inferior. In part, this behaviour is learned from service providers who use it to keep people in their place. It is a major obstacle to successful organizing, particularly in the area of leadership development. Leaders need to be trusted and looked to for inspiration, not feared and loathed.

The degree to which individuals adopt authoritarian attitudes seems to be related directly to the level of authoritarianism tolerated in their particular environment. In traditional men's hostels this level is high and the willingness of individuals to renounce past friendships and side with the institution is correspondingly high. In the more relaxed women's residences, the boundary between the institution and the residents is much more blurred, the "trusty" system is not so blatant and those given responsibilities are less likely to flaunt their new roles before old friends.

Learning to Speak the Language

All groups and sub-groups in society share a particular language. Since the homeless tend to come from the bottom layers of the working class, their language is likely to be that of the poor working class. There are, of course, real difficulties in defining what is meant by the poor working class. In any case, organizers must learn the language of this group.

Restricted and Elaborated Language Codes — The homeless are people who have endured more of the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" than most and have done more than their share of the dirty work of society. Their language is coloured by these experiences, since language is primarily a form of communicating experience. Working class people favour anecdotal language, using it in a way that assumes a host of shared and understood meanings. Points are illustrated by way of stories that involve the speaker. By contrast, middle class people favour more conceptual forms of speech that draw generalizations and make abstractions.

Basil Bernstein (1971) has developed concepts of elaborated and restricted speech codes based on studies of language and inter-class communication bar-

riers. Elaborated codes allow generalization and conceptualization whereas restricted codes depend largely on personal anecdote and experience. The homeless use generally the restricted speech code. Therefore organizers must become comfortable with this form of language if they are to communicate with the homeless.

In his discussion on the education of an organizer, Saul Alinsky (1971:70) writes:

> He learns the local legends, anecdotes, values, idioms.
>
> He refrains from rhetoric foreign to the local culture.
>
> He knows that worn-out words like "white racist," "fascist pig," and "motherfucker" have been so spewed about that using them is now within the negative experience of the local people, serving only to identify the speaker as "one of those nuts" and to turn off any further communication.

Language and Sex Differences — In his study of the use of language by the British working class, Richard Hoggart (1958) noted that men spoke very differently in the presence of women than when the group was exclusively male. This tends to be true also among the homeless. Clearly the gender of the organizer can be important here too: a group of homeless men will likely speak differently with a female organizer than they would with a male.

It takes time, and gradual acclimatization to the culture of the homeless to learn the language. The organizer must at first do more listening than talking. There are no language texts for the language of homelessness and it is likely to be quite different from city to city.

Drawing Strength from the Indigenous Culture

In *Organizing: A Guide for Grassroots Leaders*, Si Kahn (1982:330) writes:

> Rediscovering our own true histories helps us restore the real values of our communities. It also helps rebuild the self-confidence and pride that both individuals and groups need — in themselves, their history, their culture.
>
> A priority in our organizing work is to help the different members of our organizations to rediscover their own histories.

Some years ago in a book on homeless men I suggested that their important role in American left-wing politics at the turn of the century via the Industrial Workers of the World (the Wobblies) should be made more apparent to the homeless men of the 1980s. This would help develop a sense of shared history and,

consequently, be a valuable organizing tool. At the Station, I tried to draw the link between the "swaggie," the itinerant worker of pre-World War II Australia, with the homeless man of the 1980s. Since then I've realized that attempting to have today's homeless men identify with homeless men of 70 or 80 years ago is somewhat unrealistic. It makes more sense to develop a sense of local history as it impinges on the lives of the currently homeless. In Toronto, for instance, the area immediately east of downtown has been historically home to men who supplied the bottom end of the labour market. Thirty or forty years ago, this population housed itself, albeit in very basic accommodation, in rooming houses and cheap hotels. Most of the rooming houses have now been converted into homes for the middle class. The fact that this area was, a few decades ago, the main residential neighbourhood for lower working class people provides a valuable history lesson. Awareness could be raised about the strength of the people who once housed themselves in an area where the homeless must now live in hostels and emergency shelters. Links can be made between the historical and the contemporary: for example, the sense of group support and mutual reliance and aid, that is a strong characteristic of both yesterday's working class and today's homeless. There are aspects of the lives of both groups that can be honoured, respected and built upon.

An increasingly popular way of developing a sense of group history is through storytelling. Groups of homeless people listen to each other's stories which become a part of the living history of their lifestyle. People begin to identify with stories similar to their own. With the development of a sense of a shared history, it becomes increasingly difficult to see the problem in individual terms. Patterns of systematic exploitation begin to stand out. Myths about alcoholism, laziness, etc., which used to make the homeless think they were the problem, are exposed when group histories are developed. There are, of course, pitfalls. Storytelling that never looks beyond individual struggles with the world can sometimes further confirm the individualistic perspective. The Alcoholics Anonymous practice of relating personal experiences to a group feeds the myth of the individual's battle with alcohol and seldom addresses structural factors.

Thus the storytelling approach must be used cautiously. To be effective as an organizing tool it must link individual experiences to wider structural causes and effects. A group facilitator for storytelling sessions can help make these links. An example would be to link people's stories of being evicted or hassled by landlords with a discussion of tenancy in the context of local legislative history. Unsuccessful work experiences can be linked to the history of the notion of a surplus army of workers.

This method of building a group history supports popular education methods and can be used in conjunction with building verbal communication and writing and reading skills. The development of a history through storytelling and newsletters can be a powerful organizing tool. The organizer must be cautious, however, in working to develop a sense of history. It will not work if it is im-

posed on a group; they must become comfortable with the idea at their own pace. Songs can be another medium for building solidarity. It is no coincidence that country music is by far the most popular among the homeless. Its basic material is the daily existence and dreams of working class people. The singers tend to have similar class backgrounds to the homeless, another reason to identify with them. In today's country music, much of the suffering is individualized, whereas country songs of an earlier era tackled the problems of the poor and powerless more directly. Songs such as those by Woody Guthrie are a good example of music's potential as a binding force and as an awareness raiser.

Like storytelling, songwriting can be a group activity and an awareness raiser. I recently attended a gathering of the homeless in Toronto where a songwriting group re-wrote Canada's national anthem. The first line went: "Oh Canada, the homeless have no land."

A recognition that country music is generally the music of the homeless can help in picking appropriate tunes for songwriting activities. As a supplement to storywriting, songwriting can also be a powerful tool in the development of a history of homelessness.

Developing Homeless-Driven Media

There are two major reasons for the homeless to develop their own media: to get a message across that the regular media cannot or will not, and to reach a specific audience. The development of homeless media brings other rewards too. It stimulates potential, and actual, creative skills among the homeless, strengthens group cohesion, and boosts confidence.

Newsletters are particularly useful since they can be remarkably inexpensive, and are an excellent method of involving the homeless in a cooperative and ongoing project. Newsletters have long been used by powerless groups to build solidarity, morale, and a sense of common purpose.

The Ticket — At the Station in Sydney, we developed two major forms of homeless-driven media: a monthly newsletter, *The Ticket*, and Radio Skid Row. *The Ticket*, a modest eight-page monthly newsletter, used the existing writing skills of many of Sydney's homeless in articles and short stories. It gave many people the confidence to write their own poetry, and helped build a sense of identity with the Station among several hundred of Sydney's homeless, an identity that endures even today. Here are some examples of poems that have appeared over the years in *The Ticket*.

Strangers

A stranger is just a friend
That you haven't met.

You might say from that opinion
Behind the ears I'm wet
Many strangers I've spoken to
Now class me as a friend
I know when you've got no-one
You need some-one on who you can depend
Some people just need to talk
Of their hassles and such,
Some demand more than friendship
And that's a bit too much.
I'll talk to anyone,
Everyone needs a friend,
Some such friends are my mates
That'll stick to me to the end.

Samantha

To "Bludgers" and Others

I sit here in the Gardens
And stare down at my jeans
They're thinning at the knees
And tearing at the seams.

I only got my cheque last week
And now I'm almost broke
So how's a man supposed to eat?
The cheque's a bloody joke.

So I go through all the papers
For the column labelled 'men'
An hour later, sick at heart
I put them down again.

Yet people call us bludgers
How soon do they forget
How they bragged of the Depression
And how they lived through it?

But we don't speak of past things
We've forgotten how
Forget the last Depression
We've got one here, right now!

The telly says to "have a go"
What do they think we are?
The way most people treat us

We sure aren't going far.

I've thought about this long and hard
And as far as I can see
Employment's no real problem
It's the Nation's apathy.

Richard

In Honour of L.W.

Dance Diamond Eyes dance
The whole room's hypnotized
As the temptress dances with black and red satin
To the glee of the sailor men.

Dance Diamond Eyes dance
As the man with the soft hand
Takes you into his command,
Far, far away to a distant mountain
Where the mighty surf bounds beneath.

Dance Diamond Eyes dance,
As the young lioness turns into a lamb
With the romance of the moonlight.

Dance Diamond Eyes dance,
As the man with the soft hand
Takes you into his command,
To the base of the mountain
Where they become one with the surf and the sand.

Dance Diamond Eyes dance,
Back from the mountain
No longer hypnotized by the flashing lights
But the memories of the mountain and the moonlight.
Dance Diamond Eyes, dance.

Moses

People Can Hurt

There are people in this world who are good and kind
There are also people very bad,
Some who are truly sane of mind
But some are really mad,

There are those who hurt others
Mainly for something to do,
Sure they had a mother,
Just like me and you.
Yet they inflict such bodily harm,
And cause much pain for others to bear,
Because they feel it in their power,
And they don't even seem to care.
Still one day their time shall come,
And they will suffer just such pain,
Because they'll know the wrong they've done,
And shall hang their heads in shame.

Daphane

Poems such as these are a regular feature of *The Ticket*. They develop a sense of pride in creative accomplishment. The poems above reflect a range of emotions and experiences: Samantha tells of her willingness to be friendly; Richard expresses his feelings about being homeless and unemployed; Moses reminisces about a past love; and Daphane expresses her anger at being beaten. These and other poets feel good about their work in *The Ticket* and, in turn, help to instill that positive feeling in their homeless acquaintances.

Articles based on the experience of homelessness are also regular fare for *The Ticket*. Here are two examples:

More Notes from Underground

One of the smaller benefits of a train strike is being able to walk through the train tunnels — and that's just what I did. After waking from a blissful sleep in Cinema 3 of the Hoyts Entertainment Centre, to my horror, I found it was 12 midnight. Luckily, the cleaners were around to let me out. So I left and walked up to Town Hall, disposed of some material that made me bottom heavy, then went onto platform 3. I decided to walk to Wynyard and, since there were no trains, why not walk down the tunnel?

So I made my way to the end of the tunnel and began to walk. It was peaceful — not a sound to be heard except the drip, drip, drip of the water seepage falling into a puddle on the side of the tracks. It was like walking through the catacombs or, if your imagination tends more toward science fiction, like being the only survivor after a nuclear war. And there was a strong feeling of being alone.

Finally, I arrived at Wynyard, went up on the platform, found a bench and crashed.

Johnno

Brian's Stiff's Tour of Brissy

I've just been to Brisbane for six to seven weeks, staying at St. Vincent de Paul's, South Brisbane, which is a pretty good hostel, $3.00 per night, videos every night (not blue), good meals (if you like mince for breakfast), sandwiches for lunch, and dinner was usually meat and potatoes and vegies.

After my six weeks up there, I bumped into so many people that I knew from the Station. It was really good to see them: Beau, Ray Stevenson, Bill Buckmaster, Ray Johnson (sometimes editor of *The Ticket*), Ian Shaw and his two kids.

You can go to the park near the Paul's Ice Cream factory in Montague Road, South Brisbane. The Christian Outreach Centre gives you a cup of coffee and fruit and sandwiches every morning of the week. Each Sunday if you want to go to Mount Gravatt with them they will give you breakfast and lunch — it's always good — salad or a baked dinner. You don't have to sit through the service. After dinner they take you back to Brisbane and if you have any troubles they are only too happy to help.

Avoid sleeping out as much as possible, cause it's not that safe. There are lots of muggings, in fact I was up there and a guy was kicked to death outside St. Vincent's — so watch it.

Plenty of work if you're qualified and cheap rents, there's the Salvo's in the Valley — don't stay there as it is $70.00 per week and Vinnies is only $21.00 per week — a big saving there. The cops don't hassle much — unusual for the police state!!! Cost of living is very cheap — rent, food, smokes and beer (not that anyone wants to know that!). The Melbourne Hotel at West End, it has very good and cheap meals.

There is also a drop-in centre at Roma Street, it has videos daily, meals and advice. Happy holidays!

Brian

Johnno and Brian are homeless "adventurers" and they enjoy sharing their exploits with *The Ticket* readers. As with the poems, the articles build a sense of confidence and pride in the authors, and in those around them. The following notice, appearing in the December 1986 issue of *The Ticket* speaks volumes for the use of a modest newsletter in building bonds and sharing those bonds with others.

In Memory of Graeme (Kiwi) Taylor

I Edward McCormack am writing this on behalf of my dearly departed friend Graeme Taylor who passed away on Tuesday the 26th of November 1985 of natural causes. I had known him for about 18 months, he was a fun happy easy going person who was well known at the Station and known as Kiwi.

R.I.P.

Will always be thinking about you as you were the best friend I had and will carry on your tradition and won't let you down. Your mate Eddie.

I Terry Hartog met Kiwi as most people remember him at the Richardson Centre. He knew most of the disadvantaged and was liked by most of them. The trait I liked most in his ever cheerful self was his ability to call a spade "a bloody shovel."

He met Neville Wran [the Premier of the State of New South Wales], cycling in Centennial Park one day with his wife and bit him for $20.00. Neville didn't have any pockets in his cycling shorts but gave him $10.00 he borrowed from Jill [his wife]. To his relatives and friends I'd say this, "Wherever he is at the moment he would be making good friends and amusing them."

Terry Hartog

Rumours — In Toronto, the Christian Resource Centre puts out a regular two-page newsletter called *Rumours*, aimed primarily at homeless people who regularly use rooming houses. Much of the material is directed towards fighting for a better deal for roomers. The following poem and article from successive 1986 issues of *Rumours* are quite similar to material published in *The Ticket*.

A Subtle Murder

Met a mad man at the beach,
Lying naked on a pier.
His head was in the water,
A crowd had gathered round.
The gulls were eating bread
From within the dead man's hand
Whispered voices said
The madman had just drowned.

I said, no, that old child
He died long ago
Just breathless now that's all

The difference is
Can't breath in your face
For a nickel for some wine
Won't remind you that your life
Is not like his

Whispered voices said his life was
No result from them
No one fed him wine
Or led him to this beach
No one touched him, no one pushed him
Or cut him with remarks
We didn't steal away his breath
Or even pass within his reach

So right you are
No stones were thrown
He slept in gutters
And no one did protest
No hate in your eyes
Or wonder at his ways
No walls no gates
Just cordial emptiness

They raised the madman up in arms
And carried from the quay
The people threw the birds more bread
The gulls flew fast away.

Paul Madden

Survival Camping

Several weeks ago, I was too late to get a bed in any of the downtown hostels. I made a tour of the all-nite coffee shops. Walking around, I noticed that the bus shelters I passed on Queen Street were occupied, as were many doorways. Around 3 a.m., I ran out of coffee money, so I headed for a quiet park to lie down.

Of course, it started to rain. Well, in the course of the next hour, I scrambled alley-ways, fire escapes, across warehouse roofs — and without exception, every little hiding hole was filled with some unfortunate person like myself. Finally, I saw some piles of cardboard by some tractor-trailers. I pulled the first pile aside. Someone was sleeping underneath. The same thing with the second pile. And the

third had 2 people under it. All this within 50 feet of trendy Queen West.

About a week after this, I ran into a friend from Guelph. We had a couple of brews and chatted. We got into his car and he started to drive me home (which, fortunately, I had again).

He saw some guys sleeping in the bus shelters — there were heavy thunder storms. When I suggested that most of the bus shelters downtown were the same on a bad night, he laughed and said I was crazy. We proceeded to drive around while we drank coffees.

15 minutes later, he wasn't even chuckling — nearly every bus shelter west of Yonge St. on King, Queen, Dundas, College, Bloor over to Dufferin was used as a bed, as were those on Bathurst, Bay and Spadina. That's to say nothing of the 60 or more around City Hall, or those hidden in trash bins, alley-ways, fire escapes, etc.

We must have saw at least 1000 people **homeless** that night — and we weren't even looking — **we didn't even have to get out of the car or leave the main streets!!!!!** What in God's name is going to happen to these people this winter?

People in this country have morals and expect their governments to fulfill these obligations. Instead, petty paper bureaucrats shuffle and waffle around while thousands sleep out.

Anon.

Many articles taking a broader view of political and economic issues, again written by the homeless also grace the pages of *The Ticket* and *Rumours*. There can be little doubt that these humble monthly newsletters with circulations of about 1,000 are a major force in holding together an important core population of the Sydney and Toronto homeless.

Radio Skid Row — Radio Skid Row was conceived to supplement *The Ticket* in building homeless group consciousness in Sydney. Like *The Ticket*, Radio Skid Row was run by the homeless. It began in a dilapidated house half a block from the Station. Broadcasting equipment was purchased with a grant from the government of the State of New South Wales. At the outset, the broadcast went out on upgraded telephone lines to speakers installed in locations where large numbers of homeless people congregated regularly, including several major hostels, the Station and the remand centre at Long Bay jail.

Program material included information of day-to-day relevance to the homeless, music, and drama. Johnno Brown, a homeless man in Sydney, honed his musical abilities busking on street corners. He wrote the Radio Skid Row signature tune:

I've got the radio on
And I'm listening to a show
Well the radio station I'm listening to
Is Radio Skid Row
It's a new station that's going to
Have a go.

Well come on Radio Skid Row
You're going to have a go
You're the voice of the unemployed
And that is fine
Well come on Radio Skid Row
You're going to have a go
To bring solidarity to all
Down the line
To bring solidarity to all
Down the line.

The following are examples of typical Radio Skid Row information pieces:

This is Radio Skid Row with information on where you can get low cost meals around the city.

The Department of Veteran's Affairs at 77 York Street, near King Street, third floor, has breakfasts from about $1.20, 7.30 to 11.30 a.m. and lunches from 11.45 to 1.45 p.m. "No Names" near the corner of Riley and Stanley Streets, Darlinghurst opens 6 p.m. Monday to Saturday and has a low cost plate of spaghetti.

Swanton Lodge, 11 Hunt Street, Surry Hills has meals from 40 cents, lunch and tea — and free if you cannot afford them. Free afternoon tea at St. James Church, Queen's Square, Sydney is at 3 p.m. Sunday. Free meals can be obtained at Edward Eager Lodge, 348 Bourke Street, daily at 1.30 p.m., a large bowl of soup, and on Sundays at 10.30 a.m. all you can eat.

This is Radio Skid Row with out-of-town accommodation in New South Wales.

At Goulburn, St. Vincent de Paul, 27 Verner Street, two minutes from the station, 24 beds free. At Dubbo, see the Catholic priest or St. Vin-

cent de Paul, accommodation is in an old four bedroomed house behind the Catholic church, food available. At Leedon, free accommodation, St. Vincent de Paul's, just behind the Catholic church. At Griffith, free accommodation, two nights only, no meals, Salvation Army and St. Vincent de Paul combined. Wollongong free accommodation, St. Vincent de Paul, Constant, near Constant station. Wagga Wagga, free accommodation overnight, St. Vincent de Paul, 34 Kincaid Street, $30.00 a week or free until cheque due. At Maitland, accommodation at St. Vincent de Paul, Bank Street, East Maitland. At Armidale, Uniting Church emergency accommodation. At Byron Bay, accommodation at the hotel is $6.00 a night, at Eddie's Place Hostel, $3.00 a night. That's at Bay Street behind the railway station.

Homeless-Driven Research: Collecting Your Own Information

Research as Organizing Tool and Confidence Booster — As a collective exercise, research can be a valuable organizing tool. It can accustom people to working towards a common goal. A research project for a group interested in the squatting possibilities presented by a neighbourhood's empty buildings might consist of several steps:

First, several people could count and make note of all the empty buildings and share this information with the group.

Second, a set of criteria could be developed for determining whether an empty building was suitable for squatting. Using these criteria, several people could assess the suitability of empty buildings for squatting. The information would then be written up as a report that could be used to make claims on appropriate parts of the system. Two or three people could write a draft report and re-write it according to total group input. The final version could be produced on the word processor of a friendly neighbourhood social agency. (A few lessons on how to use the equipment should not be a difficult hurdle.) The beauty of modern word processing equipment is that the homeless-developed report can look as good as those produced by professional researchers. However, the content of the report must also be sound.

The homeless, it is often claimed — untruly — do not possess the skills to produce such a report. If the actual skills are not there, then the ability to acquire them is there: producing a credible report is mostly a matter of carefully following a few basic rules.

Research carried out by the homeless gives them full control over the product. When research is carried out by an outside expert, it might be said that the research is done to the subjects for the outsider. When it's done from the inside it's done for and by the subjects. Research done by outsiders on powerless groups

tends to confirm the latter in their powerlessness; their experiences are used for the advancement of someone on the outside, much as raw materials are mined from underdeveloped countries for the benefit of developed countries.

Getting people's own stories down on paper is a valuable form of research, particularly if this is done thematically. One of the most insightful and influential books on the place of work in modern society is Studs Terkel's *Working*. The book consists of interviews with 116 people who tell their story about their work. There is no attempt at analysis by the author; the people and their stories stand by themselves. This kind of research can be carried out relatively easily by homeless groups and used as powerful information to support claims on the system. Again, this can be a cooperative effort. Stage one could be a group meeting designed to identify the theme. Stage two could be people talking to their fellow homeless on the streets, in coffee shops, in drop-ins, in bars. Stage three could bring the whole group back together to decide which stories are best to use in the report. Stage four would be putting it all together.

Using What Is There — It is important to work with the homeless to make them fully familiar with the information resources in the community. Public libraries, university and special libraries, community information centres, community legal services, etc., are all accessible. Some groundwork may have to be done to help people overcome the feeling that they are out of place in institutional settings such as university libraries. This step may be followed by a session or two on how to do research. The basic tools are simple and most homeless people will have no more trouble grasping them than the average undergraduate student. An organizer who isn't comfortable handling this can call upon someone else to lead a session with the group. The organizer can likely do it on his or her own on future occasions.

University students looking for research projects can help the homeless develop research skills. They can also be enlisted to help homeless people feel more at home in university libraries.

People working with the powerless often believe that social research is something that only the "experts" can do. It's not true. A group of homeless people, with some initial guidance can turn out a credible product. The pay offs in terms of confidence building and group building are enormous.

Putting "the Con" to Work

Ask any ten people who have worked with the homeless to identify a basic skill that is found among the population and nine of them will say something like, "getting the system to work for them." The system in this case means the array of players in the social welfare network, as well as the value system of the society in general. Largely owing to their long experience with the social welfare

network, many homeless people are expert at making it work for them. It is a necessary skill for survival. The homeless are crafty when dealing with care givers. They know which words will ensure a bed for the night or a free meal, when the food bank opens and what the rules are, and when to appear helpless and grateful. Experience has taught them that when hitch-hiking or panhandling the claim to be "looking for a job" brings a much better chance of a long ride or more spare change.

The skill of conning someone or some part of the social welfare system is often mistaken for duplicity or evil-doing. It is actually a vital skill that the homeless must develop in order to get by with some dignity intact.

My point in discussing the con is that it depends on a sophisticated understanding of human behaviour, of power relationships, of levels of trust, and of negotiating. All these skills are essential for effective group action. The challenge for the organizer is to identify these skills and to bring them together in such a way that they lead to positive group action. At the individual level, the con is a method of survival. At the group level, it can be a method of bringing about change.

Popular Education Strategies

As discussed previously, levels of innate ability among the homeless are high. However, attrition of ability through chronic self-deprecation and a lack of formal training can lead to low self-confidence. Encouraging individuals to enrol in courses at formal educational institutions is not a solution. These institutions are forbidding, lead only to further self-deprecation, and have inappropriate curricula. A more likely solution is to develop popular education strategies along the lines of those pioneered by Paulo Freire, the Brazilian educator who worked with the rural peasantry. Popular education strategies are more likely to succeed if they are oriented around both the life experiences of the homeless and around some worthwhile project. For example, examining the problem of poor sanitation at emergency shelters could use an educational curriculum comprising a history of the development of hostels that incorporated the personal hostel experiences of those in the group. Simple math exercises could be developed based on things like the number of beds in a particular hostel, the percentage of men and women in a hostel, their average ages, etc.

Leaders of popular education strategies need not have formal teaching qualifications. What is required is people who are able to read, write, and handle simple mathematics. Where are such people likely to be found? Among the homeless! The organizer's only role may be to bring together those homeless who know their reading, writing and math, with those who do not. He or she may also work with the "teachers" to develop the popular education curricula.

Toronto has a particularly successful example of a literacy program that has adopted popular education strategies. "Beat the Streets" uses street people as staff to teach other street people. The parks, doughnut shops and drop-in centres are the classrooms and the daily experiences of life on the street provide the material from which the curriculum is mined.

Organizing Meetings

Meetings are one of the most important tools of organizing, but if they are not properly planned, organized and followed up, they can waste time and be very counter-productive.

Time — It is a mistake to believe that, for the homeless, time is unimportant. The time of the homeless cannot be treated in an off-hand way. The world of the homeless is governed by time. There are times to get up, to leave the hostel, to be on hand for a meal, and to apply at the welfare office. These and other events are important and must be considered when meetings are organized. Meetings must have a concrete purpose, be set at a suitable time for the majority of the homeless group, and last no longer than necessary.

Many government and voluntary social agency employees fail to see that time is precious to the homeless. When meetings drag on pointlessly, it is unlikely that homeless people will risk wasting their time again. Thus meetings must be planned carefully.

Planning — Considerable time and effort must go into planning any meeting, particularly a group's first meeting. To ensure that potential participants support the stated purpose of the meeting, it is best that this purpose be developed by those participants.

The size of the meeting should match the scale of the issue. Most organizing among the homeless is around small-scale, local issues. Therefore most meetings can be relatively small, of less than, say, thirty people.

Organizers must spend time talking to homeless people in coffee shops, and on the street in order to gauge the level of interest in the issue. If the interest is lukewarm then a meeting won't work. Sometimes it can take weeks before a handful of people agree that the issue is one worth meeting about. Then it is back to the coffee shops, and the streets to see where and when the meeting should be held. It has to be in a place that is close, easily accessible, and where people feel comfortable. Finally, it is back around to tell people of the date and venue. In the case of a large-scale meeting on a bigger issue, it should be announced beyond word-of-mouth contact, using flyers, posters and perhaps spots on community radio and television. But even for large-scale meetings, word-of-mouth contacts still draw the largest turnouts.

After the first meeting it is a good idea to determine how many more meetings will be necessary, and when and where to hold them. Regular, though not overly frequent meetings, can be a good way of giving a group a sense of concrete direction and existence. For this to be effective, meetings must fulfil their goals and must come to an end once the goal has been reached. However, if a group of homeless people has developed bonds through meetings, then it makes sense to develop further tasks to keep the group alive. For instance, if the original goal was to organize shared accommodation, a further task may be the ongoing management of that accommodation.

Running Effective Meetings

Agenda — Without an agenda to act as a route map, it is almost impossible to keep a meeting on track. Prior planning will likely have produced an agenda already agreed to by many of the participants. If there is no agenda then it should be the first piece of business.

Getting to Know Each Other — A simple exercise for new participants is to get to know each other. This can break the ice and relax the participants, particularly the shy ones. An example that I have used with groups of all kinds is the "Introduce your new-found friend" exercise.

Participants pair off, and if there is an odd number then the organizer also takes part. Participant A interviews participant B for five minutes, asking where he or she is from, why he or she came to the meeting, etc. The roles are then reversed and participant B interviews participant A for five minutes. Then the chairperson asks each participant to introduce his or her friend to the group.

Chairperson — It is usually acceptable at a first meeting that the organizer act as chairperson, at least until there is agreement on the agenda. Often the election of a chairperson will be the first item on the agenda. It would be wise to elect a chairperson simply for this particular meeting. The chairperson ensures that the meeting sticks to the items on the agenda, summarizes discussion of each item to everyone's satisfaction before moving to the next item, and ensures that all participants have an opportunity to express their views on all the items, rather than hearing from only one or two domineering loud-mouths.

Note Taker — It is useful to have someone keep a written record of the meeting. This need only be a rough outline of the major points discussed and a list of those present. Such a record gives the group concreteness and legitimacy and, if copies can be run off, they are useful reminders to people of time and venue of the next meeting. (This should be the last item on the meeting notes, separated from the rest so that participants can see it easily.) At the outset at least, formal titles like secretary are unnecessary and the task should be rotated.

Written records can be useful but they should not be depended on too heavily nor regarded as essential for two reasons. First, if an issue is likely to arouse strong local opposition (e.g., an attempt to convert emergency shelter into long-term housing), then you do not want opponents to get hold of your action plans in the form of written meeting minutes. Second, there is considerable illiteracy among the homeless: too heavy a reliance on the written word is likely to leave out many potential participants.

Use of Newsprint and Marker Pens — In recent years there has been a tendency to rely heavily on newsprint and marker pens to help meetings function more smoothly and to give participants a better grasp of where things are headed. Typically such meetings function with a facilitator and a recorder. The facilitator acts as chairperson, and the recorder records the essence of what is discussed in full view of all participants by using marker pens and newsprint. The full sheets of newsprint are taped to the wall to give participants a continuous picture of the discussion development. This is an informal, interactive method that includes all participants in the process as much as possible. Again, I would add the caveat that organizers be particularly sensitive to the level of literacy in the group. If it is low then using newsprint and marker pens is obviously not appropriate. However, in modified form, it can still be used effectively. The recorder can read the written material back to the group periodically.

Length of Meeting — Meetings should be as short as possible to effectively cover the business. If possible, keep meetings to an hour. Short, but productive meetings will encourage people to come back again. Long, unproductive meetings almost guarantee that people will not return. As one organizer friend penned:

> Short and quick
> Does the trick
> Brings 'em back again
> Long and boring
> Gets 'em snoring
> Drives 'em off in pain

Formal versus Informal — Too much formality can confuse meeting participants. It can also crush people's natural exuberance and creative thinking. Organizers need to be familiar with formal meeting rules to avoid being "blinded by science" when opposing other groups, but the use of formal procedures in organizing meetings for the homeless can simply feed some people's tendencies to authoritarianism.

Action Strategies

Action strategies may develop from a series of meetings. In fact, for meetings to continue in an effective and rewarding way, it is frequently necessary to link them to action strategies. The meeting process outlined above is often used to build support for action and to develop action strategies.

Homeless action strategies are frequently aimed towards the acquisition of housing. One small-scale action strategy with which I was directly linked was the development of a small tent city on government-owned property north of Sydney, Australia. In this case, several homeless people had begun meeting about the appalling state of hotel, hostel and rooming accommodation in the city. Most of the places were infested with cockroaches and the beds were bugridden. The action strategy that developed was for several of the homeless people to buy inexpensive tents and set them up on government land.

Identifying the Problem — The first step is to identify the problem, a process which should fully involve the homeless. It should start with a loosely run brainstorming session with a group in general agreement about a common concern. For example, people in a particular hostel may be annoyed that the management will not let them meet to discuss their concerns, a common enough problem in some hostels. The group decides, outside the hostel of course, that something must be done. Step one in the brainstorming session is to let everyone have a say about what they think the problem is. In this part of the session no one is allowed to comment on what others say. Newsprint and marker pens are useful to record people's statements. In our hypothetical case, participants may say:

- There's no suitable space for us to meet in.
- The staff are too busy to deal with the issue.
- The management is frightened that we might be too critical.
- Some of the staff are for it but the Manager is against the idea.
- Not enough of the residents are interested in meeting. They just use this as a stop off place and don't give a damn while they're here.
- If the place was run better I wouldn't even be interested in meeting with people.

The next step is to focus on the particular problem and reach a consensus on what it actually is. The recorder can lead the group in identifying which statements of the problem are most closely related and which are clearly unrelated. This moves the process towards an agreed definition of the problem. People feel some sense of ownership of the problem through this lengthy but useful process since they had a hand in its identification.

Our hypothetical problem may finally be identified as the staff of the facility preventing residents from meeting. Once the problem has been identified, it is time to go on to the next step — agreement to tackle the problem.

The approach outlined above is sometimes referred to as "consumer activation," a community organization method frequently used to improve services to middle class consumers. In the world of the homeless, hostel situations provide ideal environments for consumer activation. Other unsatisfactory services, such as noisy sleeping conditions, provide obvious material for consumer activation approaches.

Agreeing to Tackle the Problem — Once the whole group has agreed on the nature of the problem, it now must agree that it is worthwhile to tackle the problem. When it is clear that there is sufficient energy and will, a plan of action is developed. This process may require several meetings, since a considerable amount of education has to take place. For example, those who are unfamiliar with the problem will have to be fully informed. There will also be a need for self-awareness education, raising awareness of attitudes towards self and others. This helps raise self-esteem and the sense of belonging to a group, and motivates people to fight to improve the lifestyle of the group.

Strategy Development — A strategy is somewhat like a meeting agenda on a large scale. It provides a road map to guide us to our future destination. However, a strategy needs to be more flexible, since it can be affected by opposition strategies. In our hypothetical situation of not being able to meet in the hostel, the hostel management may act in an unexpected way, forcing the group to change its strategy. Si Kahn suggests that one way of developing an ability to anticipate the opposition's strategy is to reverse roles. What strategies might the hostel management adopt? Kahn (1982:158) states that good organizing strategy:

- is thought out well in advance
- builds on the experience of people
- involves people
- is flexible
- has depth
- is rooted in reality
- is based on people's culture
- is educational

Power Analysis — Gregory Pierce (1984) has developed an exercise that can be of considerable use in strategy development for homeless groups. The exercise takes the form of a brainstorming session with a recorder, as follows:

i) Record the names (scatter them across a large sheet of newsprint) of the major institutions, organizations, groups and individuals who play a role in a particular issue. These are the sources of power and represent potential opposition or support. They may be local businesses, political groups, service clubs, social agencies, motorcycle gangs, banks or union locals.

(ii) Have the recorder draw a circle around each of the names, making the size of the circle equal to the relative power of the names. There should be some discussion about each of the names before the circle size is agreed upon.

(iii) Draw lines between the names to show where connections and relationships occur. Indicate whether these are positive or negative relationships. The main power brokers, at least around this chosen issue, will be those names that have many lines emanating from them. The discussion generated by this line-drawing exercise is tremendously useful in developing an understanding of power relationships in the community, and how decisions are made. It can be of considerable assistance in strategy development.

Identifying and Sharing Tasks — To continue the road map analogy, there are locations along the route that we must pass to reach our destination. These are the tasks that must be performed for the strategy to work. These may be things such as printing flyers, meeting politicians, calling the media, interviewing residents and staff in other hostels, etc.

The most effective way of sharing tasks is to have group members voice an interest in a particular task and then see whether everyone agrees that this is the best person for the job. It will be necessary to check on what progress is being made on the tasks so that the group can know how the plan is proceeding. Ad hoc systems have to be set up where, for example, Joe will speak with Mary at the drop-in centre next Thursday evening and Mary will report to the group. The final step is to evaluate the whole process. Did it have the desired result? If yes, why? If not, why not? The evaluation should then be used to inform future action strategies.

Leadership Development —

> Leaders succeed only when they embody and express, for better or worse, values rooted in the social character of group, class, or nation. (Maccoby,1981:23)

Good leaders are essential to make action strategies work. Most leaders come by their abilities through their daily life experiences. This is no less true of the homeless than it is of the denizens of corporate boardrooms. For Gregory Pierce (1984: 90-91) good community leaders have the following qualities: stability, accountability, power, anger and humour, patience and vision. Good organizers recognize this and keep an eye out for potential leaders. The organizer uses current leaders to teach leadership skills to potential leaders through such activities as organizing and running meetings, dealing with the media, working on strategy development and interviewing homeless people and social agency staff.

One of the major ironies I have experienced with good leaders among the homeless is that many are also the most geographically mobile. At the Station in Sydney, we had several first class leaders from the homeless population. Vince

lived out of the back of an old station wagon, a vehicle that had taken him across Australia several times. He had worked as a cook on outback sheep and cattle stations and at various military bases, and as a handyman/carpenter from Broome to Bendigo. Vince was a major force in starting up the Station newsletter, *The Ticket*. He wrote several articles for early issues and developed the crossword puzzles. He had all the attributes of a leader. Others were influenced by him and worked closely with him on the newsletter and other projects, such as finding empty hotels and houses for squatting. Vince had a wealth of knowledge about how the social services system worked, right across the country. When Vince moved on, as he inevitably did, there was a gap in Station activities and the newsletter languished for several months.

Tim, another leader, had also worked in every state of Australia. From an early age, he worked on and off at carnivals and circuses. He had also spent considerable time in the army. Tim was the catalyst behind the tent city north of Sydney. He led the others into the bush and taught them how to camp. Within two weeks, the camp was outfitted with a stove Tim built from old culvert pipes and a hot water shower that he constructed from materials found at a nearby dump. When Tim decided to move on, others joined the camp, but it soon fell into disarray. The shower system collapsed and the tents fell over. Eventually, the camp broke up and the campers returned to city flophouses and hostels.

Alex came from New Zealand. He had spent many of his 25 years in jail or running from the police. When he first came to the Station, he was looking for a place to set up a squat. With help from others at the Station, he soon located a suitable spot in the downtown area. Within two weeks, he had eight others living with him in a well-organized squat. As with Vince and Tim, Alex also moved on. The eight fellow squatters could not hold things together for more than a few weeks after Alex had gone.

Mary was only 21 but there wasn't a city in Australia she had not been to. She never lacked for anything, although she seldom worked at regular jobs. She knew how to get what she needed from the public and from the voluntary social service system in every state. Others learned a great deal from her while she was at the Station. They learned how not to be timid when dealing with social service staff, and that women need not depend on a man to get by. But Mary was never around for more than two or three months at a time. She sent frequent postcards, which boosted morale, but it was not the same as having her there.

It was apparent to organizers at the Station that we needed to be on continuous lookout for leadership potential. In this way, as leaders left for other parts, we were able to identify people who could fill the gap.

The one quality the homeless are likely to be lacking in, by dint of their structural position, is power. Organizers can provide vital assistance in gaining this quality through advice on how to pull the right strings, who to talk to, and when,

etc. If leadership development is encouraged enough, the problems we experienced at the Station are not so likely to arise.

Coalitions — A popular action strategy with powerless groups is to build coalitions among groups. Coalitions can increase power far beyond the means of a single group. In the area of homelessness, coalitions are frequently built by like-minded agencies around issues such as housing, landlord and tenant legislation, and health problems. However, these tend to be coalitions of agencies rather than coalitions of the homeless themselves.

At the Station, coalitions were built between the homeless and pensioner organizations to tackle the issue of unsatisfactory pension and benefit levels. In Toronto, a group of homeless formed a coalition with the Union of the Unemployed to advance the case for a downtown, community-run health care facility. These types of coalitions tend to be short-term; dealing with the issue and then breaking up. They can be a valuable part of a group's strategy, bringing together a wide range of organizations without much in common to exert a great deal of pressure on an issue. Short-term coalitions do not involve the organizational maintenance that becomes necessary with broad-based, multi-issue coalitions.

I believe that short-term coalitions make the most sense for homeless organizations. This belief stems largely from their relative powerlessness vis-à-vis most other organizations with which they are likely to form a coalition. The danger with long-term coalitions is that they are likely to work in such a way that the homeless organization eventually becomes a junior partner, or worse, becomes dominated totally by the other organizations. A good example of such a process was the loss of control by the homeless of Sydney's Radio Skid Row, which came out of work at the Station. Initially Radio Skid Row was to be run for and by the homeless, which was the case for over a year. In time, other groups became interested in promoting the radio station, foremost among them a group of University of Sydney students. The upshot was that the studio was moved to a site on the university campus and today, although there is still some homeless input, its management and philosophy is determined essentially by students. Thus coalition building must be done carefully. Organizers have to be aware of the dangers of being taken over by more powerful groups that may simply wish to advance their own causes.

Drop-Ins — Drop-ins are informal places where the homeless can feel at home. They are temporary refuges from the world out there. But they can become much more. They have the potential to become staging grounds for action, for awareness raising, and for exchanging information and goods. What a drop-in actually becomes depends on the philosophy of those who run it. Drop-ins, as islands of stability in an otherwise unstable life, are obvious locations from which to organize. In Chapter 7, I will discuss in detail my experience setting up two drop-ins for the homeless in Australia.

Skills Training and Community Economic Development

Most Western countries today have elaborate skills training programs to train people for skills that are in short supply.

Historically, the homeless have provided labour to carry out tasks that are unpleasant, poorly paid and intermittent. The homeless have been the ones who had to develop a high tolerance for high geographic mobility and marginal living conditions. It was primarily the fact that this was the only way in which they could sell their labour that made them homeless. As such, homelessness was important to a particular kind of economic system; i.e., one that finds it profitable to maintain a large number of workers on the margins, so that they can be brought back into the system when their skills are needed but kept at minimum cost when their skills are not in demand. Labour intensive, seasonal occupations were the most obvious direct causes of homelessness until recently.

(The current situation in South Africa where much of the labour is raised and kept in Bantustans at no expense to South Africa is a graphic case of homelessess generated by labour demand.)

Their skills then have been largely those of phenomenal endurance. Many of the tasks that were once carried out by the homeless — crop harvesting, railway building, snow shovelling — have now become highly mechanised and capital intensive. The homeless are seen by the developers of skills training programs as poor bets to fill jobs at the bottom end of the service industries, such as catering, retailing, and secretarial work. Consequently they are ignored. However, as discussed previously, there is a high level of potential among the homeless population. It is unfortunate that this potential has so few opportunities to express itself in the world of work. There are undoubtedly many possibilities for skills training among the homeless, but in most countries the homeless are seen as a poor risk for government-sponsored skills training programs.

The lack of a stable home base does make the development of skills training programs for the homeless a difficult exercise (just as it makes organizing difficult). But as I have attempted to show, there is nothing impossible about organizing the homeless; it should be similarly feasible to develop skills training programs. Training programs for the homeless must avoid training simply for "bottom of the pile" jobs, which do little for the self-esteem of the homeless.

At the time of writing, a group of organizers and agency people in Toronto are attempting to sell the federal government on a skills training program for the homeless. The program will be based on the results of interviews with the homeless population to determine what skills already exist. It will also determine what skills the homeless feel confident about and are interested in developing. Interviews will also be carried out in the business community to ascertain what skills are in high demand, and to identify attitudes towards the homeless and the assumptions underlying those attitudes. Trainers involved in such programs must

possess many of the attributes essential to the organizer among the homeless. They have to be patient and flexible, much like the successful teachers that Ken Auletta describes in his classic work on training the powerless, *The Underclass*.

More ambitious and far-reaching than training programs for the homeless is community economic development. Community economic development builds new employment-creating activities run by and for community groups, providing employment to community groups. (By contrast, training initiatives train individuals for jobs in the wider economy. The newly trained person will likely take his skills out of the homeless community.) For success with the homeless in such initiatives, there must be outside input and support. Most successful attempts at community economic development involving powerless groups have drawn upon dependable financial support, particularly in the early stages. They have also required ready access to some form of technical support. The financial and technical support must come from organizations or institutions that believe strongly in economic development as a strategy for bettering the lot of the homeless.

3

Making Claims on the System

Once an organizer has accomplished the initial task of helping a group become effective enough to push for improvement in its situation, it is necessary to begin making claims on the system. By the system I mean organizations, groups, and individuals that have the ability, owing to their position in the overall structure, to assist in making necessary changes. In this chapter we look at public servants, politicians, business, organized labour and the media as sectors that need to be influenced if goals are to be reached.

Putting Public Servants to Work

No matter how low we may be on the totem pole, we have the right to ask our public servants to work for us. Although many would argue that the most effective route to public servants is through elected politicians, it can be just as effective to go to them directly or in conjunction with an approach to politicians. This can be done most effectively by developing a four-part strategy: (i) demonstrating support for the project; (ii) using concrete models; (iii) involving the homeless; (iv) piggybacking on already existing programs, events and policies.

Demonstrating Support for the Project — It is imperative that a group be able to demonstrate that its activities are supported by other groups and organizations, particularly if the group does not have a strong power base through direct links to some well-established organization. This means that it is necessary to encourage the group to form links and, when appropriate, coalitions with other groups. These will demonstrate to public servants that a group's demands represent more than a single voice in the wilderness. It will also help a group's case

to have the support of elected politicians. Membership in ongoing coalitions can be useful, since they build up strong links over time.

An example of coalition-building is seen in Toronto, where the Supportive Housing Coalition has helped link small organizations working towards appropriate housing alternatives for the deinstitutionalized. In Sydney, the Station Users Group linked with the Union of the Unemployed and a state-wide organization, Shelter, to protest the lack of affordable housing. The experience was used later to lobby public servants with a model for long-term, scattered housing for the homeless, an effort that eventually succeeded.

Using Concrete Models — Much of the organizing effort among the homeless in recent years has focused on the provision of appropriate housing. The most successful initiatives have been those that went to public servants with well-planned, concrete models. In Toronto, the Homes First Society developed a model of shared, resident-managed accommodation. This may seem a modest approach but to many in the public service who had paternalistic attitudes towards the homeless, the idea was revolutionary. The model was created over several years with considerable input from social service personnel, organizers, and homeless people. In time, the model was conceptualized in written statements of philosophy and architects' drawings.

Armed with this model, the Homes First Society was able to argue successfully for building a block of shared apartments that now house 77 formerly homeless people. This building has become a base and example for other homeless groups to argue for similar projects. Concrete models are useful in lobbying public servants because they replace the negative stereotype of the homeless with examples of positive achievements. For example, the public servants who eventually decided to support the Homes First project with public dollars were people who had fully swallowed the negative stereotype of homeless people. They could not imagine 77 brain-damaged alcoholics, schizophrenics and bums living together peacefully. Discussions with these bureaucrats about the plan provided an opportunity to subvert these stereotyped images. If organizers and homeless groups are fully aware of the predominant thinking in relevant branches of the public service they can shape their models to find ready acceptance. This requires a well-developed sense of anticipation. If the ground work is done effectively enough, a model can be sold to public servants as though they conceived and developed it themselves. This is a case of giving them a project that fits programs that they are able to administer. There are dangers of co-optation in this process that the organizer has to look out for.

Sometimes the struggle to convince and change minds does not have to be long. In the case of Radio Skid Row in Sydney, state public servants were ready to listen to an innovative idea because they had previously become aware of the real nature of the homeless population through meeting and working with them. They thus came into direct contact with the homeless people who had direct re-

sponsibility for the success of the Radio Skid Row project. Not only were homeless people exercising leadership in the project, they were also developing the ability to speak to public servants in their language. For their part, the public servants saw homeless people as capable of running a project and benefitting from it.

Involving the Homeless — The development of concrete projects provides excellent opportunities for effective organizing and organization building. The concreteness of the project provides the organizing effort with tangible goals. A pitfall to avoid is to allow a project to be carried out entirely by agency staff, even though the development of the model may have had input from the homeless.

Full involvement of the homeless at all stages makes sense in at least two ways: first it guarantees that the project is being used as an organizing opportunity; and second it has a higher probability of success. Full involvement is based on an investment of time and effort to build the leadership abilities of the homeless people involved. They must know how to speak language that will be understood by the public servant. The homeless person must be schooled to feel comfortable in the environment of a public bureaucracy.

An example of insufficient preparation and confidence-building came during the public hearings of the Royal Commission on the Economic Union and Development Prospects for Canada in Regent Park, a large public housing development in Toronto.

At the time, several colleagues and I were working to develop housing alternatives for the homeless in Toronto. I was Executive Director of Dixon Hall, a neighbourhood-based social service agency just south of Regent Park. I had worked with others to create an emergency shelter, sleeping up to sixty men a night in basic accommodation. The notion was to use the shelter as an "entry point" to securing long-term housing. We sponsored organizing activities out of the shelter as a springboard goal. (This case is discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.)

Harry (not his real name) was a member of an active group of homeless men who were working towards moving into permanent housing. When I learned that the Royal Commission would be holding hearings in the local school hall, I asked Harry if he would be willing to talk briefly about the problems of homelessness in Toronto based on his own experiences. Harry agreed to this several weeks before the event. We agreed to meet on the day of the hearings, an hour or so before they were to begin. On the day, Harry and I walked together to the hearings: he told me he felt a little nervous. I tried to reassure him, saying it would be a low-key event and that he would be fine once we arrived. Was I wrong! The large gymnasium was filled with row upon row of seats, facing a long table where the Royal Commission members sat, before their microphones under blinding television lights. In the centre of that long table were two microphones for the community deputants to tell their story.

Harry panicked. "Jeez Jim, I can't go up there!" he protested. I didn't blame him. I would not have wanted to go up there either. We huddled together and scratched out a few notes before Harry's turn came. Harry went to the table, and pulled a chair up to a microphone. "Perhaps he's going to be all right," I thought, relaxing a bit. But Harry just sat there with a shy smile frozen on his face. The community resident who had just given her story saved the day by asking Harry questions about his lifestyle; Harry somehow stumbled through her questions. When it was at last over he came back and sat beside me. "Sorry, Harry," I said. What an understatement!

Piggybacking — Events, programs and policies that are already supported by the state can be used to gain government support for other related initiatives. The International Year of Shelter for the Homeless (IYSH) provided many opportunities for homeless groups around the world to find public sector support for their projects. These events change the public-sector climate, at least for a time, and make public servants more amenable to taking a broader view of the homeless issue. Although the original events are primarily run by public servants, they provide many opportunities for piggybacking.

In 1987, workshops and conferences on the issue of the homeless were held across Canada. The workshops brought together a wide range of people, including many of the homeless, providing opportunities for groups to form new coalitions. They raised issues that will alter the climate of public sector approach to homelessness for some years, issues such as the need for more involvement of the homeless in projects purporting to assist them; the danger of social agencies acting as agents of social control; the nature of community opposition to the establishment of affordable housing in their midst; and the need to alter municipal zoning laws. More concretely, governments made funds available for initiatives aimed at improving the situation of the homeless. An example of such an initiative is Street Health, a non-institutional health service located in a large drop-in centre in downtown Toronto. IYSH funded a small-scale study on health needs and barriers to appropriate health care for Toronto's homeless. The study has since been utilized to encourage further input into Street Health by the homeless.

Existing programs and policies also provide entry points into public sector support. It first requires considerable time and effort to become familiar with the philosophies and goals of the programs. Then it is possible to fit programs into projects whose ends may be somewhat different but which can be made to sound consistent enough for support to be acquired.

Embarrass them! — When other strategies fail, the "embarrass them" method may still work. It is done by holding events designed to demonstrate to the public at large that the government is not doing what it should be doing. Demonstrations of placard-carrying homeless people, government office sit-ins, tent cities in public parks, and "alternative conferences" are all tried and true ways

of embarrassing governments. The main problem with such approaches is that they usually have to be directed at politicians who, if sufficiently embarrassed, will push the appropriate public servants to act. A major problem with this approach is knowing whether or not it had any actual effect on government policies and programs. Unless there is an immediate and obvious change, it is virtually impossible to know if a causal link exists between the action and the changed policy or program.

Using Politicians

Most Politicians Want to Keep Their Jobs — Politicians do not have the same security of tenure that public servants have in their jobs. At election time they put their job on the line. Most of them want to continue in public office.

Homeless people have the potential power of making their vote count, although homeless people tend not to be regular voters, with the exception of countries like Australia where voting is compulsory. So the first step in getting some leverage over politicians is to make sure that a homeless group is registered and that its members come out to vote. This is a difficult task when a permanent address is required in order to register. Nonetheless, a politician is more likely to listen if your group is not totally disfranchised. Registering the homeless to vote at election time can be an essential tactic if an election is scheduled at the same time that a homeless issue is coming to a head. Another way of impressing upon politicians that a substantial number of votes can hang on a particular issue is through coalition building. As with the public servant, it is essential to demonstrate to the politician that your group and its project is well supported.

A truly effective way of guaranteeing political support is to elect your own candidate. This may be unrealistic for most of the small-scale organizing discussed in this book but it can happen even with relatively powerless groups so long as they have been organized over long periods of time. An example is the Downtown Eastside Residents' Association (DERA) in Vancouver. Two members of the Association sit on the Vancouver City Council. Although many of the issues DERA deals with involve and include the homeless, its membership is mainly from people of the working class, many of whom have a long tradition of involvement in labour unions.

Finding the Appropriate Political Level — In Canada welfare programs are administered largely by the municipal level of government, housing programs may be administered by municipalities, provinces, or the federal government, and unemployment assistance programs and many skills retraining programs are administered primarily by the federal government. Organizers must know which level of government has jurisdiction over which program so that the appropriate politician can be approached.

Local politicians tend to be more accessible simply because they are more often in the neighbourhood. Of course, if you happen to be in a state, provincial, or national capital then higher-level politicians will also be accessible. Access depends not only on geographic closeness but on how public a particular political forum is. City Halls, local politician's offices, and municipal council chambers tend to be more accessible than provincial and national legislatures. But even in a city that is not a capital, there is likely to be a nearby constituency office for the area's provincial or federal politician.

Face to face contact with politicians is essential for success. Letters and telephone calls are better than nothing but they are weak instruments compared to personal contact. It is for this contact that it is essential to fully develop homeless leadership skills so that the homeless can put their own case. Preparing for such an opportunity should not be taken lightly. Leadership must be built painstakingly so that maximum advantage can be taken of even a few moments of direct contact.

Left and Right — Although Ralph Miliband may be correct in asserting that, despite the rhetoric, the policies and programs of parties of the left and right are quite similar and support the status quo (a simplistic paraphrase of Miliband's arguments in *The State in Capitalist Society*), there can be important differences between politicians of the left and right when working on homelessness issues.

Left politicians are more likely to listen to a homeless group. They will more likely share some of your world view, particularly in relation to inequalities in society and the basic structural nature of homelessness. There is a better chance of getting off on the right foot without having to play word games. Left politicians also likely have a stronger sense of social justice and believe less in the market making everything okay. Thus the probability of being able to enlist the support of the left-leaning politician is much greater. This is even more likely in an area with a strong left-leaning tradition, particularly in local politics. Toronto's inner city Ward 7 has a long tradition of left-leaning local politicians that improve greatly the probability of local political support for homeless organizing efforts. In Sydney, the Surry Hills area with its Labor tradition is also likely to furnish strong local political support. This tendency holds at higher jurisdictional levels also: where the politician leans left, support is more likely to be forthcoming. If there is a coincidence of left-leaning politicians at each jurisdictional level then so much the better, particularly if the issue is area based.

With politicians of the right, organizers and groups must do a better sales job. To help bolster the group's legitimacy when meeting such a politician it is a good idea to bring along a sympathetic businessperson in a support role. A couple of enlightened businesspeople can do more to change the thinking of a right-wing politician than whole armies of the well-meaning socially aware.

A useful tack with right-wing politicians is to provide a well-researched statement that details the potential costs of not doing what you are attempting to do.

If it is impossible to enlist the support of the right wing politician, a group may have to be satisfied with making him or her a neutral force.

Going to the Top — Some organizers believe it a waste of time to deal with small-fry politicians and that the only way to get things done is to go to the top. In many cases this means going to the heads of ministries and departments. Getting to see a minister can often be difficult since they are usually shielded by office staff. Groups often must resort to subterfuge to make a first contact. One method is to learn about a function the minister is to attend on a particular day and then show up with your group. Marches on ministries and occupations of minister's offices are frequently used as attention-getting tactics. But less confrontational tactics may in the end be more successful. A non-confrontational way to get the ear of a minister is through a close staff member such as an executive assistant.

Once face-to-face contact has been arranged, the opportunity must not be wasted. Those designated to make the visit must be thoroughly prepared. An effective method of preparation is a brainstorming and role-playing session. Brainstorming will draw out every question and contingency that may need to be considered during the meeting; role-playing will help develop comfortable styles of relating to bureaucrats and politicians.

Involving Private Business

The private sector possesses considerable talent and energy that is often directed towards social justice issues, a fact often overlooked by those who work directly with the homeless. People who own and manage small and large businesses tend to be as badly stereotyped as the homeless. The secret is to approach the private sector with an open mind. A left-wing approach to homelessness need not condemn private business out of hand. To do so would be to cut off contact with a vast pool of useful skills and connections.

Evidence of a strong sense of social justice in the private sector can be seen on United Way boards throughout Canada and the United States. Admittedly much of this community service is self-serving, but the same criticism can be levelled at individuals in the voluntary and public sectors. For the purposes of homeless groups, there is no doubt that the boards of social service agencies such as the United Way (or smaller neighbourhood agencies) are places to make useful contacts with private sector people interested in helping to solve social problems. It is better to arrange meetings with the private sector through their social service contacts rather than attempt to see them in their own offices or board rooms, for at least two reasons. First, the daily pressures of business will likely make the homeless group's concerns seem trivial to the businessperson. The meeting is likely to be superficial and hurried so the businessperson can return to real business. Second, the organizer and the homeless are likely to feel insecure in busi-

ness surroundings and, therefore, unable to argue their point forcefully. The voluntary social service milieu is one in which both sides can feel comfortable and unthreatened.

In my own experience in work with social agencies, I have found numerous private sector individuals willing to put time, energy, and experience to work on issues of homelessness. During my time as Executive Director of Dixon Hall, the neighbourhood social service centre in downtown Toronto, private business people played a strong role in developing projects to improve conditions for, and increase input from, the homeless. They were particularly useful in discussing and developing small-scale community economic development projects.

Some organizers have suggested to me that the urban private sector cannot be utilized for community-oriented projects that try to improve life for the powerless. They attribute this to urban business people lacking the sense of community responsibility often present in smaller, rural communities. Although there do appear to be more successful rural community economic development projects with extensive private sector input, I am nonetheless convinced that private business people can be used positively in urban settings, and my Dixon Hall experiences reinforce this conviction.

There can be little doubt on one count: there is a very strong representation of the "movers and shakers" in the private sector. Their moving and shaking talents can be of considerable value in organizing efforts.

Although it would be inaccurate to label most private sector decision makers as right wing, some of the approaches suggested above for recruiting right wing political support may also apply to the recruitment of private sector support. In addition, it makes sense to appeal to the economic wisdom of private sector individuals. Arguments for project support should come in the form of savings for society generally. For example, it costs the taxpayer more to keep a homeless person in a hostel than to house a homeless person independently in affordable housing. Another example might be that hostel residents who have to walk the streets deter people from shopping at adjacent stores. Would it not be better if hostels were open around the clock?

The approaches to the private sector also need to be legitimated by other private sector people or by respected social agencies such as the YMCA or the United Way. Once private sector people have been recruited to support a project it is necessary to keep them involved and use every opportunity to allow them to mix and work with the homeless.

Tapping Into Organized Labour

There appear to be few recent instances of labour unions being used as resources in organizing projects for the homeless. Today most of those who work

with the homeless believe the effort involved in trying to make union connections is probably not worthwhile. One person I interviewed who has been involved in organizing women said, "I don't think they [unions] give a shit." Other problems arise when organizers think of unions as natural allies of the homeless, when in fact many homeless people cannot work because they are not union members and cannot meet membership requirments. Most ironic of all is the inability of homeless people to get work on housing projects designed to house the homeless because they are are not members of construction unions.

A recent tendency that may bring increasing opportunities for building up union support of homeless initiatives is the unionization of small-scale social services, many of which already work with the homeless. Employees in the public sector welfare and social service organizations have had unions for some time but it is only a recent phenomenon in the small, voluntary sector agencies. An example is the case of six neighbourhood social service agencies in Toronto, three of which have joined the Canadian Union of Public Employees since 1981. The other three agencies will likely unionize over the next few years. Five of these six settlement houses have some direct work with the homeless. One runs a year-round emergency shelter and employs two outreach workers to organize groups to move into long-term housing, among other things. This agency is unionized. Another is completing a building to house 40 or so homeless people and runs an ad hoc drop-in program. This agency is not unionized and has close to 100 staff, the largest of the six agencies. The other three agencies, two of which are unionized, have staff who work directly with the homeless to develop drop-in based programs. With these types of agencies, organizers need to look carefully for opportunities for linkage with the homeless.

Small-scale union locals, involved daily in the issues of homelessness are likely to be more receptive to suggestions for joint action with the homeless than are large, geographically-removed locals.

Using the Mass Media

Protecting Dignity — Many homeless people are afraid of the media for a variety of reasons. They may fear losing what little they have. For example, the venue of a media event may be someplace the recipient of a welfare cheque should not be, such as at a job. The person may think "My welfare worker may see me here, and that's trouble." A homeless person may be wanted on a criminal charge and prefer not to appear on the television news. They may simply wish to protect their already limited privacy. Media people often barge into hostels and film homeless people sleeping in dormitory beds. It is not difficult to understand why many protest being filmed. After all, not many people would welcome unannounced television cameras into their homes. There is a general lack of respect for the privacy of the powerless. Powerlessness is often perceived

by those with relative power as a licence for them to barge in at any time. George Orwell found this in rooming houses for homeless men in 1930s London. The media must be taught that the right to privacy is as essential for the powerless as it is for those higher up the social hierarchy. Organizers have to be particularly sensitive to this. Images of dozens of people sleeping in a church basement may provide dramatic publicity for a housing campaign but this type of publicity must be carefully considered. Never arrange such an event unilaterally, without solid input from the people who are going to be photographed. If there is no consensus, then drop the idea because the damage done can be far greater than the support gained. An alternative in such a situation is to use group leaders, organizers, or staff people as media spokespeople.

Social agencies sometimes use the media and the homeless in a cynical, self-serving way to improve their own public image, at the expense of the homeless. An example is the following story, related to me by a regular at the Station in January 1981. Frank had attended a New Year's dinner at one of Sydney's large social agencies providing shelter and other services for the homeless. "When I got there hundreds of blokes were waiting to go into the dining hall. Well they got us all sat down, I've never seen them so polite. 'This way sir'. 'How are we today sir?' all this kind of talk. They put great plates of turkey and stuffing in front of us and then . . . wow, lights, action, cameras. The TV lights were so bright I could hardly see my turkey. Needed my sunglasses. Anyhow, the signal goes up for us to start eating. So we closes our eyes, smiles at the cameras, as best we could with turkey and stuffing hanging out of our mouths and all squinty-eyed. I felt like a cross between a TV star and a gorilla at the zoo at feeding time. Turkey was good. What I got of it. Then . . . lights out, cameras packed up, TV people on their way. Almost as soon as they'd left the room our plates are whipped away from under us with 'That's enough,' 'Bugger off now,' 'On your way.'" What the television viewer saw from that news clip was that the agency was doing a damned fine job. What Frank got from the actual experience was totally different.

Hooking and Holding the Media — To interest the media in the first place requires a good story; something that will help sell the newspaper or keep people tuned to a radio or television news program. An important part of using the media effectively is to make the organizer's idea of a good story seem like a good story to the media as well. This is a difficult path to tread since the media person controls the final product.

Good stories for the media are ones with a new twist, and, since nothing under the sun is new, it becomes a case of putting old wine into new bottles. If the story is about a group working on a new housing project for the homeless, it must be made to seem like a very different housing project from previous ones. It may require brainstorming with the group to come up with a new angle.

The secret of success is to convince the media that your story is sensational. This will bring them in but that is only the beginning. Once you have them there you have to back away from the sensationalism yet still hold their interest. Sensationalism sells newspapers but it can backfire on a project, producing the opposite effect from the one desired.

An example occurred in Sydney, early in the winter of 1980, when several homeless people were found dead in the streets. Some of the social service agency people were concerned about this situation. They felt an urgent need to increase the number of shelter alternatives to avoid more deaths. Death in the streets is sensational enough to get the media interested, and it was seen as an issue that could push the system into providing more housing. A press conference was held to put the case to the media. The result was a series of highly sensational articles. The headline in Sydney's *Sunday Telegraph* of May 25th read: "SYDNEY SHAME: Red tape lets homeless die in City's streets." The first paragraph read in bold type: "**More than 400 homeless Sydney people — some of them only teenagers — will die needlessly in the next few months.**"

In fact only four people died on the streets that winter!

So why was this a problem? Apart from the ridiculous exaggeration of the facts, the whole moral panic created over homeless people dying in the streets sparked politicians into demanding that government pour money into large-scale, institutional projects. We had been aiming to get funding for small-scale housing initiatives where the homeless could have some kind of control. Although some parts of the homelessness industry benefitted from these extra monies, the homeless lost out.

The media, especially television, like visual events such as demonstrations. Placard-waving marchers descending on City Hall or on legislative buildings are good camera fodder, as are large-scale sit-ins and office occupations. Physical confrontations such as evictions of squatters from empty buildings are also considered newsworthy. In the winter of 1985-86 a group of homeless women in Toronto planned to pitch tents at the future site of a multi-million dollar domed sports stadium. They wanted to draw attention to the fact that millions were to be spent on a building that would keep spectators and athletes out of the weather for a few hours at a time, while hundreds of homeless people lived in the weather all the time. The event never came off, partially because of the anticipated difficulty of controlling the story.

One way of having some control of the story (although it is unlikely to work with highly visual events) is to prepare a package. This may consist of some typed material, a couple of articulate, well-prepared homeless people ready for interviews, and perhaps an organized tour of a project site.

DON'T GIVE DUMB ANSWERS TO DUMB QUESTIONS. When talking to the media fight the expectation to provide a 30 second answer to every possible

question. This kind of exchange has been termed "bumper sticker discourse." Most of the problems and issues you deal with are not reducible to short, pat answers so refuse to play along.

TELL YOUR STORY THE WAY YOU WANT IT TOLD. Do not allow interviewers to answer their own questions by putting words in your mouth. This is another case where advance brainstorming and role playing with the group can prepare individuals. Assemble the group before the media event and have individuals assume the roles of interviewer and interviewee.

A method used by some groups is to record or videotape the whole process and review it after the event, asking what might have been said more effectively, what should have been avoided, etc. Comparing a video recording of the event with what made it on the television news is also a useful exercise. This helps to understand what kind of material tends to get edited out and what is left in.

KNOW YOUR MEDIA ALLIES. It is important to have a good sense of who works for which newspaper, or for which radio station. Someone should take responsibility for keeping a list of names and updating it regularly: media people tend to be shuffled around a lot. Media people who cover social issues such as homelessness tend to be fairly junior and on their way up. This means they are not likely to be around for long. Therefore, one must stay on top of who has the social issues beat. You should also know which reporters are sympathetic and which are good at getting their story (a faithful version of your story we hope) past the editor's desk intact and into the paper or news broadcast. Contacts should be cultivated a little too by keeping in touch even when you may not need to. Send reporters material just to remind them that you are still alive.

Working with the media is difficult but it can be the best way of getting your story across to the public at large, which is often the best way of moving the whole system in the direction it needs to go to help your cause. Although planning provides a better chance of control over the eventual media story, even the best-planned events will not guarantee a fair media representation. This reality causes some organizers to avoid the media at all costs. But good media coverage is usually the result of good organizing and the risk is sometimes worth taking.

4

Getting Access to Money

The type of small-scale organizing for local projects that is discussed in this book will not require enormous amounts of money. But even small-ticket items like coffee and doughnuts for meetings must be paid for. Someone must pay the organizer too. (The organizer is often an employee of a social service agency with an interest in doing something positive about homelessness.)

For our purposes we will assume that the organizer's salary is being covered by some agency or group of agencies and that additional funds to build the organization are needed. The funds may be needed to support activities like those discussed earlier in this book — newsletters, health centres, drop-in centres, meetings, and information collection.

When a group starts thinking about generating its own funds it means that new organizational duties and tasks must be considered. Someone will have to act as treasurer; a bank account will have to be opened; financial reports will have to be prepared for meetings, etc. These new duties have positive and negative aspects. On the positive side is the fact that the group can see something concrete happening. A bank account gives the group more concrete legitimacy in the eyes of its members, and helps people to focus on the best way to use their time and effort. On the negative side is a tendency for the group to become rigidly structured and institutionalized. Meetings can be devoted to narrow discussions of the correct way to make a financial statement, with a consequent loss of the sense of the group's goals and a diversion of energies away from the group's major purposes. People eventually lose interest and the group dies. In *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed and How They Fail*, Piven and Cloward advance the theory that once a group becomes overly organized it becomes institutionalized and the system at large is adept at accommodating its demands

without making real changes. I believe it is a valuable warning. Groups that spend their time fussing over financial statements are less likely to effect change than those that stick to the initial purpose of their formation.

Thus groups must consider the positive and negative sides of fundraising before they take this step. For some groups it may be better to stay away from fundraising altogether. However, for those groups that do wish to establish a funding base, here are some ways of going about it.

Fundraising

Modest amounts can be raised through activities like panhandling and organizing special events. More ambitious fundraising will mean approaching government sources, foundations and the private sector.

Panhandling — The major reason for discussing panhandling is not in terms of a quaint, and sometimes remunerative, custom but in recognition of a potentially strong core of effective grassroots fundraisers within the homeless population. The secret is to take this skill and use it for group rather than individual advancement. Group panhandling efforts are not foreign to the homeless. I have participated in group panhandling efforts aimed at raising enough for a bottle or for some food. Organizers need to examine ways in which this skill can be applied to broader purposes. There is no reason why, for example, it could not be used to buy refreshments for a meeting or to open a bank account.

(One of the major fundraising problems of volunteer organizations is a shortage of people who are unafraid of directly asking people for money. In this regard the homeless are ahead of other powerless groups, since so many of their members have no fear of asking people for money.)

In *The Art of Asking: Handbook for Successful Fundraising*, P.H. Schneiter lists what he believes are the seven reasons people have for making donations. These are:

1. Religious beliefs.
2. Guilt about the suffering in the world.
3. Recognition and a desire for immortality.
4. Self-preservation and fear (of hell, or more earthly dangers such as an uprising of the powerless).
5. Tax refunds.
6. A sense of obligation (e.g., grateful patients' bequests to hospitals).
7. Pressure (peer pressure from a pushy fundraiser).

All of these reasons should be kept in mind when working on fundraising efforts, no matter whether the approach is to the private or public sector, to foundations or private businesses.

Special Events — The main drawback of special events such as bake sales, dances, bingo nights, and concerts is that they require a lot of time to organize for a relatively small return. At Dixon Hall we had a special event of transforming the agency into Nashville, Tennessee for ten days every summer and inviting people to come by for a drink and to listen to some country music. The number of volunteer hours consumed in planning and running the event, cleaning up, and solving problems with the neighbours was enormous. If the amount of time required to make these events happen were calculated as an hourly rate of return, then it would make no direct economic sense to use special events to raise funds. But they do make indirect economic sense.

These events are ideal vehicles for spreading the word about what an agency or group does. Most of the 10,000 people who came to Nashville at Dixon Hall had never heard of this agency. People learned about the work of the social agency through wall displays, copies of the monthly newsletter, and direct queries. The event was useful in helping to broaden the base of support, so that when more direct fundraising methods were used, the agency enjoyed greater recognition and legitimacy among the public.

Similarly, bake sales, rummage sales and bingo nights can be modest fundraisers, and even better exercises in public relations and awareness raising.

There is no reason why homeless groups cannot organize these types of special events. In September, 1987, a coalition of groups working with the homeless in Toronto put on a conference and festival called NO PLACE LIKE HOME. It incorporated music, theatre, storytelling, poetry, songwriting, and mural painting, and brought together hundreds of homeless people, social agency staff and the general public. It was intended less as a fundraising event than a chance to raise awareness. People took the occasion to learn about issues surrounding homelessness and about the abilities present in the homeless population. These people would likely be more supportive of homelessness causes in the future.

Getting Money from the Public Sector — Much of the monetary support for organizing among the homeless is likely to come from the public sector. There are three inter-related approaches to acquiring public money: (i) becoming familiar with the range of departmental funding programs within government that are relevant to the homeless; (ii) forming close ties with individual decision-makers in relevant government departments; (iii) developing an expertise in written submissions.

Identifying the range of funding programs available from all levels of government can be a big job. It may make sense to use a team approach and tackle it like a group research project, in the manner suggested for collecting information

in Chapter 2. A properly conceived research effort can also act as an organizing tool, and can strengthen cohesion and awareness of the complexity of modern governments.

It is not easy for people in homeless groups to form close ties enough with individual government decision-makers. It's hard to get to see them at all. One method is first to find out who is sympathetic to the cause, on either the political side of the government or in the bureaucracy. When you have a sympathetic ear you can ask who the important decision-makers are. It undoubtedly works best to first approach a sympathetic ear rather than to go directly to the key decision-makers.

As in any work of this kind, it is important that the organizer not regard him or herself as the most important actor. The organizer may get the ball rolling but it must be passed on to a member of the homeless group as soon as possible. The organizer can then offer support from the background. Some assistance may be needed in choosing the appropriate type of dress and language for meetings with both the sympathetic ear and the decision-maker. This method of gaining access to public funds is probably the most important of the three approaches. Without it, the other two are next to useless.

Preparing written submissions may be the least vital of the three approaches. The most important rule is to find out exactly what the particular government department wants in the submission and to give them that. This will likely entail a lot of checking back and forth with the government contacts you have cultivated. If an individual turns out not to have much sway within the department, you should take particular care to maintain previous contacts and develop new ones.

Even the most carefully-crafted submission could be a waste of time without previously established personal connections. However, once personal connections are solid it is important to follow up with a good written submission. There are two reasons for this. First a strong written submission can be used by your internal advocates to bolster your case within the government department. Second, a well-prepared submission can be the difference in competing with other groups for public funds.

It may be worthwhile to bring someone in from outside to help put the submission together but this should be done only if the person is willing to let the process be homeless-driven and only if there is a real need after having looked closely at all the group abilities. Many government programs develop a format for written submissions. These should be adhered to as closely as possible.

In my own experience, the written submissions that do best are those that document the community support for the project and those that stick closely to the proposal guidelines. Written submissions also need to be followed up by a constant barrage of lobbying on the group's behalf. It is here that your political

contacts can be most useful. They should receive a copy of the submission at the same time it is sent to the government department, and they should be kept up-to-date with progress reports.

Foundations — Canada and the United States have published directories that list philanthropic foundations, the kinds of activities each foundation funds, how much money it typically donates, and conditions of funding. In Canada it is the *Canadian Directory to Foundations*, published by the Canadian Centre of Philanthropy in Toronto; in the United States it is the *Foundations Directory*, published by the Foundations Centre in New York. It is worth buying a copy or, if you're short of cash, you can probably borrow one from a local social services agency or a local library. Some cities have special fundraising information libraries. In Toronto, for example, there is a library at the Centre for Philanthropy.

The directory is a take-off point for approaches to foundations. Take time to read each entry. If you simply skim the directory you may miss good opportunities because you have been misled by the title of the foundation. As with the search for government funding programs, the search for appropriate foundations should not be restricted to those that express an interest in homelessness as such. Poverty, powerlessness, illiteracy, popular education, urban studies, housing, ethnic minorities, youth, community development and skills training may also be key words that indicate possibilities for funding for homelessness projects. One of the secrets of successful directory use is to be imaginative about making homelessness projects fit a wide range of categories.

The approach made to foundations can use strategies similar to those used with government departments. School yourself on what is available, make personal connections and assemble well-argued and well-presented written submissions. Foundations tend not to be as bound by red tape as government departments; their decisions can be made very quickly. As with government departments too, written submissions arriving out of the blue are not likely to be successful. Advance work must be done to make personal connections. This is sometimes more difficult with foundations because the only connection point may seem to be a post office box. Be persistent in identifying the key decision-makers.

Private Sector — Although philanthropic foundations are part of the private sector, they do not embrace all the possibilities within that sector. Other parts of the private sector can provide small-scale, in-kind support (e.g. coffee and doughnuts for your meetings, or soap and razors for a drop-in centre) as well as large-scale monetary support.

Initial contacts with private sector support are likely to come through approaches to local small businesses. These are reasonably good bets for some support because they do have a sense of community concern and responsibility, which can be brought out by a good salesperson. In some cases, local small businesses may be adamantly against a homeless project. The organizer's job is to

sort out the supporters from the opposers. It can actually be quite surprising how many local small businesses are interested in supporting your efforts. The beauty of local small businesses is that they are so accessible. It is just a case of walking in off the street and striking up a conversation.

Larger, less-accessible businesses should be approached like foundations. A business directory in a local public library will list all public companies and their top executives. Some useful ones in Canada are *Canadian Key Business Directory*, *Scott's Manufacturing Directories*, and *Guide to Canadian Financial Services*. In the United States, *Moody's*, *Standard and Poor's* and *Dun and Bradstreet* are good directories. An executive officer may be your initial contact point. Executives tend to be quite mobile, so check the directory information by making a phone call before writing a letter. If the executive cannot be reached by phone, then write a letter. If the firm is close by, you can ask to make an appointment for a meeting.

Homeless groups should use their toughest people for face-to-face meetings with private sector executives. They should be tough in the sense of being committed to making a sale and not be easily dissuaded. You may not be able to help private sector executives make profits directly but you may be able to sell them on the public relations potential of your project. Appeal to their good business sense rather than to their sense of charity.

Like other fundraising methods, approaches to the private sector will be positive only if they are used as organizing experiences for the homeless. Fundraising done by organizers on their own, or by professional fundraisers may bring in the money but it will not strengthen the organizing skills of the homeless. Fundraising should be first and foremost an organizing tool.

Money through Memberships — Thus so far we have looked at ways of raising money from outside the group, but what about internal sources of funds? Homeless people do not have much money to spare but it is wrong to think that poor people have no internal financial resources. Si Kahn (1982:271) writes about poor people's capacity to contribute something:

> People individually may not have much money. But together they have a great deal. If an organization is important to a person or a family, several dollars a month is not too much to ask them to pay in dues.

One of the strong points about using membership dues to help support the organizing effort is that it helps to build a sense of group identity and of ownership of the project. The money collected may seem insignificant but the organizing pay-offs can be substantial. If the group does implement a membership fee, then it is probably wise to allow people who cannot raise the fee the option of contributing in kind, perhaps through their contribution of work on the project.

Miscellaneous Sources of Support

There are other groups and organizations that may not be covered by the kinds of categories discussed above. In the field of organizing the homeless it is often small-scale organizations that are the source of such support.

Churches and Church Groups — Churches, through their congregations or through linkages with church coalitions, may be useful funding sources. Church congregations in neighbourhoods with a high proportion of homeless people may be particularly open to overtures for financial support of organizing initiatives. Although the amounts involved may be small, the church groups are often highly accessible and sympathetic. Coalitions of church groups such as PLURA in Canada (Protestant, Lutheran, United Church, Roman Catholic and Anglican) are often interested in social justice issues and may be willing to support organizing efforts.

Sympathetic Social Agencies — Some social agencies will be particularly sympathetic to organizing efforts among the homeless. It can be worthwhile spending time identifying these agencies and approaching them for funding support. As with any potential funding source, the personal, face-to-face approach is most likely to pay off. A presentation may need to be made to a voluntary board of directors. This represents an opportunity for organizing a homeless group to develop the presentation. As with churches, the amounts of money raised from social agencies are likely to be small, but the moral support is valuable.

Support In Kind — Churches and sympathic social agencies can also often be valuable sources of support in kind. The offer of a church basement or of a telephone and office in a social agency, free of charge, is often worth much more to an organizing effort than money, particularly if there are few strings attached.

In fact, these agencies often provide the institutional base for organizing efforts by providing an organizer's salary, office space, and support services. As long as the agency is willing to give the organizing effort autonomy and allow control by the homeless, then this can be the best of all possible worlds, for it provides legitimacy, material security and continuity.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, successful fundraising can lead to organizations becoming more bureaucratic and rigidly structured, and therefore less responsive to the needs for which they were initially set up. Organizers have to be particulary sensitive to these problems. "Anti-institutional" controls must be built into the organizing effort from the outset and they must be strong enough to withstand increasing pressure by funders to become "more professional." If "more professional" means decreased control by the homeless, then an organization that began with the goal of being different and more responsive to the needs of the homeless will have simply joined the homelessness industry discussed in Chapter 1.

5

Homelessness: Some Social Theory For Organizers

In this chapter I want first to express some of my views about the main factors contributing to homelessness, and second to introduce several important social theories that have some relevance to working with the homeless. I am firmly convinced that organizers should be aware of such theories. Society is very complex and organizers owe it to themselves to try to unravel some of that complexity. A basic knowledge of social theories helps to make some sense of the apparent fragmentation of day-to-day life and provides different vantage points from which to view the social world. Finally, a knowledge of social theory exposes flaws in the arguments of those we often confront in our organizing activities.

The Mismatch between Opportunities and Abilities

There is a marked division in Western countries between those who believe that opportunities and resources are sufficiently evenly distributed and those who think they are not. The former group believe it is possible for all to "make it" in a material sense within their own lifetimes, so long as one applies oneself. The second group believe that the opportunities to "make it" are greatly exaggerated, and that those born as "have nots" are likely to remain in that position for the rest of their lives: in other words, there is only limited opportunity for those at the lower end of a hierarchically structured society to improve their lot. I support this second view. The opportunities for upward mobility that exist in

democratic and socialist industrial societies are concentrated in the middle and upper ranges of society.

The belief that all can make it so long as they try hard leads to an individualistic explanation of society; i.e., people rise or fall because of their intrinsic abilities and willingness to work hard. The opposing view — that society is structured in such a way as to make it very difficult, if not impossible, for all to succeed — leads to a structural explanation. These two opposing explanations of how society works have a profound effect on the type of solutions offered for social problems.

Social scientists such as H.J. Eysenck and A.R. Jensen argue that innate intelligence exists and that IQ tests are able to measure it. Jensen and Eysenck believe that intelligence is primarily genetically determined, i.e., determined by the genes that individuals inherit from their parents. Jensen claims that different races have varying typical IQ levels because they draw from different gene pools. The danger in such theorizing is obvious: it supports racist beliefs in inferior races and groups of people. It also leads towards the conclusion that those who did not make it in school, and later in life, failed because of their so-called innate inability.

Christopher Jencks, looking at educational achievements in America in the 1970s, arrives at opposite conclusions to those of Eysenck and Jensen. For Jencks, the social background of an individual is the most important determinant of schooling success or failure, and of success in society. Individuals from working class backgrounds typically became employed in working class occupations, while children of parents who were professionals were likely to become professionals themselves, IQ levels notwithstanding.

I am strongly convinced by my own research into powerlessness and homelessness, by my firsthand experience as a homeless person, and by my involvement as a social welfare practitioner that those at the bottom of our social system are there primarily because they were born there. This conviction leads me to reject individualistic approaches to the problem of homelessness and to embrace approaches that look critically at the systematic inequalities built into the social system. It would then seem to make sense to organize those at the bottom so that they can apply pressure for change in the social system as a way of improving their lot.

Social Theory and Organizing

For the past twenty years I have moved back and forth between the worlds of social theory and social practice. I have earned a living as an itinerant crop picker, farm labourer, and construction worker, and have done my share of wandering around the world. Later I taught social theory at colleges, and worked as a so-

cial welfare practitioner in Australia and Canada. Over the years I have become increasingly convinced that the worlds of social theory, of social practice and of day-to-day experience need to be more integrated. Social theory makes no sense in isolation from the world about which it theorizes. Perhaps even more than the social welfare practitioner, the organizer must be able to make some sense of a complicated world. I believe strongly that some familiarity with social theory assists in this.

In this section I look at some of the major social theorists who have, in my view, some relevant things to say about the way society works. Although many of them developed their theories in 19th century Europe, the bulk of modern social theory is still based on their work. I give the briefest of outlines of their ideas, hoping by this to engender a sufficient interest in organizers so that they will further pursue these ideas.

Many of the classic works in social theory make heavy going. One way around this is to form reading groups of a few people who meet regularly to discuss an article, book or series of books that each group member has read. It can be a good organizing tool as well as an educational experience. The only way I could plow through Marx's *Capital* was as a member of a reading group in Sydney.

Emile Durkheim — Durkheim's work had four major focuses: (i) the establishment of a social science with as much validity as the physical sciences;(ii) the rise of individualism in contemporary society; (iii) the nature of moral authority and its sources; (iv) the practical uses of social scientific knowledge.

For Durkheim the individual cannot exist outside society. Society's characteristics are not derived from its many individuals, rather the characteristics of the individual are derived from society. It is society that defines an individual as a human being. Psychological approaches to individuals, therefore, cannot provide a full understanding because they regard individuals as isolated beings acting on society.

Writing in the late 19th century, Durkheim was particularly concerned with the shift towards a liberal, individualistic approach to life. The eternal verities of the village were being rapidly displaced by the constant flux of urban life. For Durkheim the social systems developed under these two very different sets of influences responded appropriately to those influences. "Mechanical solidarity" was what held together the pre-industrial rural society, whereas "organic solidarity" held things together in the industrial urban setting. Mechanical solidarity implies that individuals have little choice over who they are or what they become. They know the local butcher by name and his children and father. Organic solidarity, by contrast, implies a wide range of choices in a world where many daily contacts are made with strangers whose names are unknown. But Durkheim does not bemoan the move from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity, for each type is appropriate to the conditions. Organic solidarity, however, provides greater opportunities for individuals to stretch themselves,

to be creative in their approach to life, to have more say in their own direction. Organic solidarity also contributes to a cohesion through the greater interdependence that arises from the increased number of roles played by people. This is most obvious in the increased division of labour in modern Western societies. These thoughts were developed in Durkheim's doctoral thesis, *The Division of Labor in Society*, as was the notion of anomie. Anomie refers to a condition in which the individual feels anxious because the rules by which he or she should abide are not obvious. In the case of moving from the mechanical solidarity of rural life to the organic solidarity of urban life, an individual can feel anomic because of the lack of apparent rules.

Durkheim also used the concept of anomie in his landmark study *Suicide*. For Durkheim anomic suicide increased in incidence when there was upheaval in society. His examples were economic booms and busts. Booms as much as busts put individuals in anomic situations because they were unable to identify the rules appropriate to their new condition. Thus, even suicide is seen by Durkheim to be a social act.

Suicide is also a landmark study for its use of official statistics. As an early sociological study using empirical data to back the major arguments, it is still well worth reading. There are many weaknesses in the study, as critics over the past 90 years have pointed out, but as a study of the social causes of individual actions it is still one of the best available examples.

For Durkheim society is held together by its moral codes. These codes are what cause individuals to behave in such a way that they support the positive aspects of the world they see around them. It is not the fear of punishment that causes individuals to behave in positive ways but an internalization of the moral codes of society. We learn these rules through our association with others; our personalities are essentially formed through these associations and the rule-learning process. Further, because of the power of these internalized moral codes, the individual comes to want what society deems to be proper for him or her to want.

Several of Durkheim's concepts can be useful to the organizer.

(a) The notion that individuals cannot be defined in isolation from their relationship to society helps move the definition of the problem away from an individual focus.

(b) The move from mechanical to organic solidarity and the accompanying dangers of anomie help to explain what the recently rural homeless person is going through. It also helps explain unthinking rejections of urban life as "bad," in comparison to the "good" rural life.

(c) Since all acts can be seen essentially as social acts then it moves our search for causes in the direction of society. The study of suicide as a

social phenomenon gives us some ideas on how to conduct our own search for social causes of homelessness.

(d) If it is true that all-embracing moral codes and rules set the boundaries for action, then it gives us a starting point from which to ask the questions. Do these moral codes and rules put the homeless at a disadvantage? Are the homeless imbued with moral codes that keep them "in their place?"

Karl Marx — It is with a great deal of trepidation that I attempt to say anything about Marx's important social theories. Nevertheless, it is important to try because the theories are of considerable importance to anyone involved in organizing the homeless.

For Marx it is the economic system that underpins all else. Social relations in society are primarily determined by the relationship of people to what he called the "means of production." In classical Marxist terms there are really two basic factions, or classes, in capitalist society, the bourgeoisie who own the means of production (the capitalists) and the proletariat (the industrial workers). These two factions are always in actual or potential conflict because the capitalist needs labour as an input of production and the worker must sell his or her labour to survive. The potential or actual conflict comes in the struggle for labour to increase its share of the wealth created in production, through an increase in wages, and the capitalist's desire to maintain high profits by keeping wages to the minimum level necessary for the survival and continuation of the labour force.

In *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx and Engels begin with the statement: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."

Thus, this ongoing struggle between two classes defined by their relationship to the major economic force in society, i.e., the means of production, is the most salient feature of economic, social and political life.

One of the reasons, according to Marx, that these two classes are not constantly hammering away at each other is that many of those in the working class suffer from the condition of "false consciousness," i.e., they are not fully aware of their true relationship to the means of the production. They do not recognize that they are of the proletariat, or working class, and thus do not realise that they are being exploited. True classes, according to this approach, can only be defined in terms of whether they own the means of production or sell their labour to live. Thus, it makes no sense to talk about a huge middle class, largely defined by occupation. Office workers and physicians live by selling their labour as surely as does the worker in the automobile factory. Therefore, they are all working class.

The relationship between the classes is not one of complementarity but one in which one class dominates and exploits the other. The capitalists are not only the owning class, they are also the ruling class. The capitalist class rules either

directly through its members' control of government or indirectly through th influence of its members on those in government. Democracy is only a sham an non-capitalists only **appear** to have any say.

Because the owners of the means of production also control the wealth an the power, society is one of structured material inequality. Material inequali brings with it the whole range of inequalities. For Marx a major irony is the fa that all wealth is created by human labour. The products of labour, be they co sumer commodities or capital goods, bear within them the "dead labour" of th working class. Without labour there is no wealth and yet the real producers the wealth have little control over it. The share of the newly created wealth th goes to labour in the form of wages is much less than the actual wealth creat by that labour. One way for labour to overcome its exploitation is to organi and demand a larger share of the wealth created by their efforts. Marx advocat the organization of workers to get this better deal, not simply industry by i dustry but as a mass movement that would eventually overthrow the rule of th capitalists and implement rule by the workers. Marx felt that through su struggles the true class consciousness of the workers would develop.

Although the economic base is the major determinant of who runs society an who gets what, the major institutions of society also reflect the interests of th dominant social class. Such institutions include the ruling ideas of the perio the family, religion, educational institutions, and law. According to Marx they function to maintain the status quo. The family reproduces the labour force the future, religion supports the notion of domination by the powerful, ed cational institutions produce fully socialized workers and managers, etc.

Unless there is some direct relationship to the productive process, the capita ist system is unlikely to take an interest in the condition of life for the bulk of th population. Housing and standards of health are of interest to the capitalist on insofar as they relate to worker productivity.

Marxists tend to be divided on the importance of "alienation" as a concept Marx's work. The so-called materialist Marxists believe that alienation was concern only to the young Marx, before the development of his major theory his most influential work, *Capital*. The so-called humanist Marxists, on the oth hand, see the concept of alienation as the central focus of all Marx's work, i cluding *Capital*. A humanist Marxist scholar, B. Ollman, writes in his book *A ienation: Marx's Concept of Man in Capitalist Society:*

> The widespread misconception that in his later life Marx left the theory of alienation behind him bears most of the responsibility for the equally widespread misunderstanding of his term "labor." Grasping "labor" whenever it appears in his writings as "alienated labor" in its full multi-dimensional sense is the key to understanding Marx's economic theories.

Alienation according to Marx is a sense of being separated from something, of having created something and yet finding that the creation is immediately opposed to its creator. Under capitalism, labour is alienated as soon as it produces something that becomes the property of the capitalist, and that enhances the power of capital vis-à-vis labour. In *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* Marx wrote:

> The worker puts his life into the object; but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object. Hence the greater the activity, the greater is the worker's lack of objects.
>
> If then the product of labor is alienation, production itself must be active alienation, the alienation of activity, the activity of alienation.

Perhaps the most useful definition of alienation for our purposes comes from the Marxist, George Novack, who writes:

> Alienation expresses the fact that the creations of men's hands and minds turn against their creators and come to dominate their lives.

From its origin in the productive process, alienation spreads out to affect the whole of society and its social relations; from product to productive activity to people's relations with their fellows. Thus capitalism brings about alienation throughout society.

Another theme running through much of Marx's work is the need to dig deeply enough into phenomena so that one can find the true **essence** of things and not be misled by surface appearances. Thus, for example, Marx saw the state not simply as an instrument of good and efficient government but as a means of keeping the ruling class in power.

The work of Marx is so rich in concepts that it is impossible to list them all without giving this entire book over to it. From the short discussion above, several Marxian concepts appear that can be useful to the organizer:

> (a) The identification of the economic base as the major foundation of society assists in moving the focus towards economic reasons for homelessness. It can be useful in turning the focus away from ostensible psychological and individual causes.
>
> (b) The concept of class struggle places the homeless squarely in the working class and raises the need to combine the struggle of the homeless with that of other members of the working class.
>
> (c) The notion of false consciousness helps in understanding why homeless people often see themselves as isolated individuals who have no common cause with others.

(d) When class relations in society are seen in terms of domination-subordination rather than complementarity, then the homeless are better able to see their position as one of extreme subordination to the ruling class. Such a view can assist in developing a sense of common cause.

(e) If all wealth is produced by labour, then all welfare supports that the homeless receive come initially from the efforts of those in the working class. Any gratitude should then be given to the working class.

(f) The homeless have known firsthand the experience of exploitation. When they work, it is usually for the lowest wages. A raised awareness of exploitation can help to develop a sense of common experience.

(g) If organizing activity is vital to raising a sense of class consciousnes among the working class, then it must be doubly true of the homeless.

(h) If capitalism is interested only in supporting those spheres of life that further enhance the productive process, it helps to explain the reluctance to provide anything but the most meagre services for those who provide the marginal labour.

(i) The concept of alienation can help to explain how the homeless often feel about themselves in relation to others and to society in general. If we link this feeling to their relationship to the productive process, which is through intermittent and highly alienating work, it again moves the focus away from the psychological and towards the socio-economic structure.

(j) Searching for the essence of social, economic and political phenomena can help the organizer in adopting a useful critical and analytical approach to his or her work.

A Marxist framework can be useful for the organizer in getting a grasp of the structural nature of homelessness. The fact that Marx's predictions of eventual collapse of the capitalist system were inaccurate should not detract from the usefulness of his work in understanding how capitalist (and so-called socialist) societies work. However, the organizer should be careful not to be labelled a Marxist, since this is likely to raise unnecessary opposition from many within the community who could be useful allies.

The social theories in this chapter, including those of Marx, should be used to help understand and explain the condition of homelessness **when appropriate and when they assist in the organizing effort.** Dogmatic insistence on the correctness of a theory can be anathema for the organizer.

Max Weber — If any social theorist comes near to Marx in terms of breadth of intellectual interest and grasp, it must be Max Weber. Many of the theories of Max Weber were developed as a critique or an extension of what Marx had to say. For Weber, Marx's insistence that all of society could be understood by reference to economic forces was a gross over-simplification and downright inaccurate. Such a monocausal theory gets in the way of fully understanding society and the history of its development. Class struggles are not a central dynamic of history. It is much more complicated than that.

Unlike both Durkheim and Marx, Weber was strongly anti-socialist in that he saw socialism simply as state ownership that extended from its historical ownership of the means of war to the relatively autonomous (and thus creative and diverse) economic sphere. Socialism would mean the extension of bureaucracy to all walks of life.

Whereas for Marx the modern economy under capitalism was seen as irrational, for Weber it was the most rational of systems, with the development of bureaucracy being the epitome of its rationality. For Weber society is divided not simply along class lines but also along lines of status and power. Status groups form in society in relation to what Weber saw as honour. Status groups are not formed on the basis of property, as are classes, but on similar interests and lifestyles. Occupational groups often become status groups; professions, for example. The sense of common cause is determined more by such status groups than by their class position. For example, members of a particular occupational group, say teachers, are more likely to see themselves as having common cause with other teachers than with members of other similar occupations. Each of the status groups receives a differential amount of honour from society and is ranked accordingly.

Weber saw class itself as being somewhat different from Marx's concept of class. The ownership or non-ownership of property was the major determinant of class for Weber (not unlike Marx) but for Weber "life chances" had to be similar for a class to exist. The concept of life chances relates as much to consumption as it does to production. Life chances would include the kinds of goods and services one could acquire; the type of schooling, for example. Class and status overlap for Weber but they can also have very different influences in terms of the group an individual identifies with. Much of status is economically determined and thus linked closely to class but much of it is related to sets of preferences that are not class-based.

The third dimension along which societies are divided is that of "parties," often translated to mean "power." This refers to groupings that form to pursue political power in its broadest sense, e.g. political parties, trade unions, pressure groups, and professional associations.

Most modern studies of social stratification owe a great deal to Weber's three concepts of class, status and power. Attempts are made to locate groups and in-

dividuals within society in these three dimensions. Models using this kind of framework end up with a much more complex system than the simple class dichotomy of Marxism. Such models develop a bewildering array of classes, e.g. upper, upper-middle, lower-middle, upper-working, lower-working, depressed. And various measures such as occupation, level of education, and income are also used to locate people. In terms of these measures a shop steward in an automobile factory may be upper-working class, in the middle range in terms of power, and high in status if he is a war veteran.

A major difference between Marx's and Weber's models of the structure of society is that whereas the two classes in Marx's model are in a constant state of potential or actual conflict, the different, interwoven strata in Weber's model are more likely to complement one another.

In addition to Weber's theoretical work on the structure of society, two of his major contributions were in explaining the rise of industrial capitalism and the nature of bureaucracy.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber argues that a major necessary condition for the rise of industrial capitalism was the correct "mind set." This mind set was provided by the rise of Protestantism after the Reformation. Protestantism, particularly in its stricter forms such as Calvinism, provided the necessary attitudes. Hard work helped to guarantee a place in heaven and the "good time-rejecting" notion of frugalism meant that the profits earned through hard work could be reinvested rather than spent on luxuries and leisure. Hard work and investment were essential to the rise of industrial capitalism. As with much of Weber's work, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was an attempt to show that Marx's economically deterministic explanation of the rise of industrial capitalism was not sufficient. Weber was keen to demonstrate that the dominant ideas at any particular stage of history are at least as important as economic conditions in the development of new directions.

The nature of bureaucracy was one of Weber's major interests. For Weber the bureaucratic form is the most efficient and rational way of getting many of modern society's tasks done. A bureaucracy is characterized by official jurisdictional areas, strict hierarchical structures where the line of command is apparent to all, reliance on written documents, expert training, and strict, learnable rules. Such a system can deliver reliable decisions and services. It is predictable, rational, and the highest form of organization in terms of efficiency.

Although much of what Weber had to say about bureaucracies was positive, he was ambivalent in his approach to the form. He saw the system as highly rational but also as depersonalizing and oppressive. And he was very critical of the type of person the bureaucracy fosters — someone with moderate ambitions and obsessed with security. Thus bureaucracies, although efficient in getting the work of society done, also tend to stifle the creative abilities of those within them.

Weber's interests also extended to work on the origins and development of religion and the development of an effective social science methodology.

Some useful concepts for the organizer that arise out of Weber's work are:

(a) The concepts of power and status help to explain how pressure groups coalesce. The notions of status and power subdivide capitalist and worker groups into such entities as occupational groups, religious groups, trade unions, etc., all with social agendas of their own. This can lead to a useful identification of possible allies and boundaries between different groups. It also implies that individuals may conceivably belong to different levels when slotted into class, status and power hierarchies, which may present barriers to developing a sense of common cause in large groups of people.

(b) The notion of social stratification draws a picture of hierarchically structured society where the different strata are identifiable by such variables as occupation, income and education. In such a schema the homeless tend to occupy the bottom stratum. For organizers it is useful to ask the question: Does such a picture of society cut the homeless off from affiliation with other groups? If so, is it necessary to compare and contrast it with the Marxist model? Certainly the stratification model is much more popular in industrial democratic societies for explaining the social system. It provides a more orderly and less conflict-ridden picture.

(c) Weber's feeling that ideas can be at least as influential as economic forces in bringing about major social changes can be liberating for the organizer. For an organizer to wait until the economic conditions are precisely correct before beginning to organize the homeless may mean long periods of inaction.

(d) Weber's work on the nature of bureaucracy is a useful guide to bureaucratic thinking and decision-making. An understanding of how bureaucracies react in certain conditions can help organizers to use bureaucracies to better meet the needs of the homeless. It is also useful for the organizer to understand the typical bureaucrat's lack of imagination and obsession with job security. It is up to the organizer and the homeless group to extend these limited boundaries of imagination.

Georg Simmel — Georg Simmel was a contemporary of Durkheim and Weber. He is ranked as a major social theorist of the turn of the century but his stature does not compare with that of Marx, Durkheim or Weber. Kurt Wolff's *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, published in 1950, consolidates Simmel's major

work, the bulk of which was concerned with the study of authority, conflict versus cooperation, and social interaction.

Simmel felt that authority came in two forms, either as the result of a particular individual having superior significance or strength — i.e., personal authority; or as a result of occupying an important role in a powerful organization — i.e., organizational authority. Related to this was Simmel's notion of leadership in which the led also act as leaders. That is, followers are also leaders in any particular group.

In terms of who occupies the important positions within society, Simmel believed that there are always more people qualified for those superordinate positions than there are positions. Thus, there is constant pressure on those in the superordinate positions to perform effectively because there are many watching who know they can do the job as well or better.

Simmel regarded conflict between individuals and groups in society as a positive force since it ultimately strengthens the groups or individuals involved in the conflict. The opposing force helps those within a group to find common cause, through their opposition to the other group. Thus, rather than avoiding conflict at all costs, social groups should seek out its positive aspects.

For Simmel, society as a whole is an intricate web of relations among individuals who interact constantly. An individual does not, therefore, exist in grand isolation from society. He or she is, in fact, a manifestation of all those interactions that occur in the intricate web. For example, an individual who is part of a family, a church-goer, a truck driver, a member of the golf club, a supporter of the football team, etc., is shaped by involvement in all these different groups. Thus an individual cannot exist apart from these interactions.

Compared to the previous theorists, the usefulness of Simmel to the organizer may seem relatively limited; however, there are some ways in which his thoughts are relevant.

(a) The concept of authority as located in either the individual or the organization is useful in determining why particular individuals wield authority. It becomes useful in examining decision-making processes in the community. If a person's authority stems from an organizational position then it may be necessary to address the organization as a whole. If it is purely personal then face-to-face meetings with that individual may suffice.

(b) The notion that followers are also leaders helps keep the organizer involving **all members** of the group in initiatives and efforts. This is further bolstered by the recognition that there are actually far more individuals qualified to play a particular role than those who happen to occupy it. This applies both to the role of organizer and to the role of

the bureaucrat who is approached for support by the group. It assists the organizer in understanding that others in the group are capable of organizing. It can also help in the recruitment of disaffected bureaucrats to put pressure on other decision-makers.

(c) The idea of conflict as a positive group-building force has clear implications for the organizer. It does not necessarily mean that conflict will be sought expressly in order to strengthen the group but it does mean that conflict situations will not always be avoided. An obvious example might be commuity opposition to the location in its midst of facilities serving the homeless. The conflict thus engendered can help to build a sense of solidarity among the homeless.

(d) The notion of society as an intricate web of interrelating groups may prompt the organizer to ask: "To what extent are the homeless integrated into society by belonging to a wide range of groups?" The answer may help determine whether homeless people really are marginalized.

Ralf Dahrendorf — I include Dahrendorf as an important social theorist because I believe that he has relevant statements to make about both Marx's and Weber's approaches. Dahrendorf's major work, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, was published in 1959. It modifies the Marxist notion of class conflict to the point where it becomes a positive and useful form of social interaction that does not threaten the basis of society. For Dahrendorf conflict has a much grander sense than it has in the work of Simmel.

From Dahrendorf's mid-20th century perspective it was difficult to see any real evidence in industrialized capitalist societies of increasing class polarization, as had been predicted by Marx. For Dahrendorf modern society is much too segmented for a homogeneous working class and a homogeneous capitalist class to form. However, Dahrendorf did enumerate the following characteristics in all societies: they are subject to change and conflict at every moment; every element in society contributes to this change and conflict; they are based on the constraint of some of its members by others. It is in these constraining or dominance-subordination relationships that the structural origins of social conflict lie. Dahrendorf calls this "the coercion theory of society." "Authority," writes Dahrendorf, "is a universal element of social structure. It is in this sense more general than, for example, property, or even status."

The class conflicts tend not to occur across society, according to Dahrendorf, but within what he refers to as imperatively coordinated groups. Such groups could be organizations such as large social service agencies, where one class is formed by the executive leadership and another by the frontline workers. From Dahrendorf's perspective these two classes are in constant conflict. What is good

for one group is bad for the other. Thus it becomes nonsensical to talk of overall organizational goals.

Dahrendorf has at least two useful concepts for the organizer:

(a) If society is constantly in conflict, then organizers must look out for schisms in the organizations with which they deal. For example, it needs to be recognized that demands made of a social agency present different threats, or opportunities, to the different "classes" within the social agency. This may mean dealing with the two classes in different ways in order to meet the goals of the homeless group.

(b) Somewhat like Simmel's notion of conflict, the Dahrendorf model can help an organizer to see positive aspects in the development of conflict.

George Herbert Mead — In 1934 George Herbert Mead published *Mind, Self and Society*. I think Mead is worth discussing because his work formed the foundation of much of what later became known as "socialization." Socialization is the process by which a person learns how to be part of society. For Mead the "self" does not exist at birth but becomes a reality as the human being interacts with those around him or her. Those who most affect the development of the self are what Mead called "significant others." In infancy and childhood these significant others are likely to be immediate family and close friends. As one moves towards adulthood the significant others may be schoolmates and work colleagues. In the wider community there are "generalized others" that also help in the definition of the self.

The significance of Mead and the whole area of socialization theories for organizers of the homeless is the belief that the well-rounded, well-adjusted person is one who has interacted throughout life with similarly well-adjusted significant and generalized others. Thus it follows that maladjusted individuals have probably mixed with the "wrong types." Although this kind of reasoning can be dangerous, it is perhaps less so than always regarding maladjusted individuals as people with intrinsic psychological problems.

Followers of Mead have carried out studies on homeless people that define them as undersocialized. This truly is dangerous stuff because it is not far removed from labelling the homeless as problem people. It tends to turn the focus toward the so-called undersocialized individual and away from his or her social experiences.

Ivan Illich — Ivan Illich is one of the most prolific social critics of the late 20th century. I include him here because I think some of his critiques of our most hallowed institutions get to the real essence of their existence. In his search for the true essence of things Illich is like Marx, but most Marxists denigrate his work because it is not based on a class analysis of society. They accuse Illich of fasten-

ing onto industrialism as the major explanation for the nature of modern Western societies.

Among Illich's many books the three that I feel are most important to organizers are *Deschooling Society, Limits to Medicine,* and *Disabling Professions.* Many ideas from these three books have been used in this book. A major theme of all three books is that human beings are being taken over by institutions whose imperatives, in spite of original good intentions, are often quite anti-human. Institutions are debilitating to people since they remove people's ability and will to take action for themselves. Thus we have a weakened society where many of the potential options have been missed. The way out is to de-institutionalize, to return to a belief in ourselves, and to recognize that the notion of "experts" is both narrow and harmful. A representative statement comes near the beginning of *Deschooling Society*:

> Health, learning, dignity, independence and creative endeavour are defined as little more than the performance of the institutions which claim to serve these ends, and their improvement is made to depend on allocating more resources to the management of hospitals, schools and other agencies in question.

For Illich educational institutions need to be replaced by "learning webs" where people with similar interests get together to discuss their interests.

Professions become the occupational form associated with the institutions that try to shape our lives and take away our freedom to do things for ourselves. Behind a rhetoric of "doing good" most professions are seen by Illich to be doing bad — taking control, and developing needs where none exist to assist in increasing their control. For example, the entire medical establishment represents the attempt of one professional group and its associated institutions to take control over more and more of our lives. Illich writes about this process as the "medicalization of society."

Feminist Theory — I must plead relative ignorance about female social science writers, likely as much a function of my own male biases as of anything else. The female social theorists I have read include Germaine Greer, Sheila Rowbotham, Betty Friedan, Raya Dunayevskaya, Ann Oakley, Kathleen Gerson and Simone de Beauvoir. Of all of them, it has been Simone de Beauvoir that has most influenced me with her book *The Second Sex*. For de Beauvoir, as for many of the feminist writers, women's oppression comes primarily from the fact that they have had to depend on a male, or the male world generally, for material support. Thus when economic dependency has been overcome the woman is liberated. De Beauvoir writes:

> It is through gainful employment that woman has traversed most of the distance that separated her from the male and nothing else can guarantee her liberty in practice. Once she ceases to be a parasite, the

> system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator.

But de Beauvoir does recognize that working for a living is not necessarily synonymous with liberty.

> Only those women who have a political faith, who take militant action in the unions, who have confidence in the future, can give ethical meaning to thankless daily labour.

Much of de Beauvoir's book deals with the socialization process of women. It looks at how women are taught from birth how to serve men, act in complicity to oppression by males, and how this training acts "to bar her from the roads of revolt and adventure."

Since women played a major role in the socialization of men in society, we need to ask not only "What is wrong with men that they oppress women so?" but also "What is wrong with the socialization process of both men and women?"

Organizers among the homeless should read books like those of de Beauvoir to get a better understanding of the homeless woman and her potential to organize. As I point out in Chapter 1, homeless women often have their act together better than homeless men. Women often become homeless because they have rejected the role of economic dependency that de Beauvoir writes about. It is often an escape from some of the worst aspects of having to put up with the tyranny of dependency, which, at its most offensive, manifests itself in wife battering.

Women who have become homeless in this way often live in a collective run by women who understand the situation from a feminist perspective. This situation provides good conditions for organizing.

Women who become homeless for the same kinds of direct economic reasons as homeless men are not likely to find themselves in circumstances that are any more conducive to organizing than men. In fact, in such a situation, it is likely that the woman is completely socialized into adopting a subordinate role to men. Such women can often be found living together with men in stereotyped male-female situations. Feminist works can be drawn upon by the organizer in this situation to help both males and females understand their condition.

Some homeless women choose to go it alone — the so-called bag ladies. It is difficult to know how feminist theory can help develop a sense of solidarity with people in such situations. However, an organizer who works towards developing an awareness of shared experiences and shared causes for homelessness may have some success with bag ladies in the same way as with loners in the male homeless population.

There can be little doubt that being one's own provider, rather than depending on a male, will likely be liberating, as de Beauvoir states, particularly if it is

coupled with radical political action. But women who have been dependent for a good part of their lives may find these gigantic steps to take. Many women organizers working with homeless women understand this and have the patience to go slowly and carefully together through the process of change and independence.

None of the theories discussed above tell anything like the whole truth but they do provide insights into how society works, an essential first step for good organizing.

Most of the books referred to in this chapter are listed at the end of the book. I recommend getting together with others interested in organizing and social theory to work through some of the major books as reading groups.

6

Organizing and the Professional

Organizers working with the homeless must often collaborate effectively with professionals. Many of the contacts that homeless people make with the world at large are directly with professionals or with organizations run by professionals. Thus the work of the organizer is bound to benefit by a better understanding of the professional world.

Another motive for discussing professionals is to examine potential linkages between them and the community development approach preferred by most organizers. These linkages may not be readily apparent since, to some extent, community development defines itself through its differences with the "professional" or "expert" approach. However, community development can in fact draw on the skills of local professionals to strengthen the approach. There is a brief discussion of community development at the end of the chapter.

Although much of this chapter takes a critical approach to the professions as social institutions, there is a recognition that individual professionals do make outstanding contributions to good organizing work. I call these individuals enlightened professionals: they are aware of the pitfalls of the institutional side of professionalism, particularly when working with powerless people. (One such individual is Professor Ian Webster, Head of the School of Community Medicine at the University of New South Wales. Professor Webster has carried out important work on health problems among Sydney's homeless population and developed non-institutional medical services to address these problems.) I refer to professionals whose primary concern is the opinion of their peers and who are little concerned about the effects of their actions on the powerless, as traditional professionals. By and large the professions have done little to help the homeless increase their power; in fact they have often acted as a major obstacle.

In the area of health care, the homeless experience has been, with some important exceptions, largely negative. Traditionally-minded professionals and impersonal medical institutions, such as large hospitals, tend to confirm the homeless in their state of powerlessness.

In sharp contrast stands a small-scale health program in Toronto called Street Health, which operates from a downtown drop-in centre. The centre is staffed by volunteers and operates quite informally so that homeless people can use the service without feeling threatened or put down. A recent study of health problems and health services for the homeless in Toronto found that alternatives like Street Health provide a more positive experience than the institutional services.

Generally speaking the experience of homeless people with the legal profession is alienating. Again, there are certainly enlightened professionals practicing law. They often operate neighbourhood legal services dealing with problems of powerlessness.

The psychiatric profession has in large part succeeded in convincing many homeless people that they have some form of mental illness. The increasing number of ex-psychiatric patients on the streets is less a manifestation of deinstitutionalization than of the tendency for the powerless to be labelled in the first place as psychiatrically disturbed more often than people who have some power.

Thus, in broad terms, professions tend to exacerbate the powerlessness of non-professionals by convincing non-specialists that they know nothing about increasingly large areas of their own lives. The rapid rise of the professions over the past fifty or so years has been an important factor in further separating the powerless from the powerful.

Social Control and the Professional

A particularly important aspect of the professions for organizers of the homeless is the tension between social control and social change and how it is manifested through the social work profession. As a profession, social work is bound to generate tension between its professed aim of helping the poor and powerless and the tendency to build its own power vis-à-vis its ostensible clientele.

Much like the medical profession, the social work profession tells its clientele that they are too ignorant of the world and their own situation to act for themselves. Thus social workers often mediate between powerless people and institutions like the courts, schools, housing authorities, hospitals, and welfare services. Most of these institutions have their own social work staff: in this way powerless people find the intermediary already at hand. Homeless people are accustomed to working regularly with social workers since it is through them

that they gain access to many necessities in life. Thus an ability to develop good relations with social workers can make for a more trouble-free life.

Most of the social service agencies with which the homeless person comes into contact have their own social workers. In some cases staff members in these social service agencies are almost exclusively social workers. In such situations the homeless person may be treated as a client by someone who pretends to know what is best for him or her. Counselling of the homeless individual by a social worker is a common approach to homeless people's problems. To the organizer counselling should be anathema since it deals with problems in terms of the individual and provides individual solutions. In this way it avoids questioning the larger, structural issues and locates the problem within the individual rather than the system.

The Myth of Rehabilitation

The concept of rehabilitation is entirely oriented towards the individual, as though the individual were isolated from society. When rehabilitation is inflicted as a supposed remedy upon homeless individuals they are told that they have a problem that can be fixed if the right steps are taken. For alcoholism, a psychiatric condition, or a drug addiction the right steps may be to seek treatment and to "change one's ways." Much of the research on homelessness also takes this point of view — that homelessness is caused by a wide range of individual afflictions. Thus Jack or Jill become homeless because they drink too much, are a bit crazy, or are drug addicts. Little attention is paid to the fact that Jack and Jill and thousands of others are poor and powerless and cannot afford the limited number of available housing units. A rehabilitative approach seeks to individualize the problem, to blame the victim. It assumes that the individual has to change, rather than the structure of the socio-economic systems. (In contrast, a structural approach would seek to increase the power and material conditions of the homeless and force housing providers to make more housing available.)

A homeless person who has been labelled as, for example, an alcoholic, often incorporates that label into an understanding of his or her situation. The condition of alcoholism may then be seen as the cause of being homeless, no matter how erroneous that may be. This is one of the most frightening aspects of the rehabilitation approach since it tends to belittle the individual and to frustrate organizing efforts. Rehabilitation individualizes and robs people of the possibility of collective power, whereas organizing strengthens the potential of collective action. Most homeless people do not in fact need rehabilitation: it is up to organizers to help prevent the application of rehabilitation to homeless people.

Organizers will face a hard fight in this area against many social service agencies and professions.*

One of the most dangerous ways in which rehabilitation is sold to the homeless is through tying so-called support services to housing availability. Many recently developed housing projects that cater to homeless people provide rehabilitation services and housing as a package. If a potential resident refuses the support services, he or she may be disqualified from taking up residence. This is a dangerous package for at least three reasons. First, the suppliers of housing may be assisting in the growth of the "therapeutic state" as outlined by Nicholas Kittrie (1971), in which anyone who deviates from certain norms is regarded as a sick person in need of treatment. This type of enforced therapy comes at the expense of the homeless' right to be left alone. Second, it leads to an insidious labelling process wherein potential residents are labelled as suffering from one ailment or another in order to gain admission. Even for those who simply play the game to get in, there is a subtle reinforcement of the belief that the conditions for which the residents are labelled are the causes of their homelessness. Third, it diverts funding away from affordable housing that would allow the ex-homeless person to live in a free and unfettered way.

The Red Herring of Alcoholism

For many years now the most popular label to attach to homeless people has been that of alcoholic. Interestingly, many of those who have become involved in the issue of homelessness in recent years have observed that the new typical homeless person is no longer an alcoholic. In fact the typical homeless person never was an alcoholic. But it is a label that has stuck over the years, despite its inaccuracy.

In many of the large institutions that provide shelter, particularly for homeless men, it is still common for staff and management to see their customers as alcoholics. This attitude was illustrated by the manager of a large Sydney hostel who during a social service agency meeting countered the suggestion that hostel residents be given leaflets explaining state legislative changes that would affect them: "What, expect them to read! My lot are all brain damaged alcoholics. How can they read?"

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* Nothing in this discussion is meant to keep the organizer from recognizing that particular homeless individuals may have personal problems that need sorting out. But it is up to the individual to seek out help and to work at personal problems if he or she wishes to do so. There are also resources within the homeless community that can be enlisted in tackling such problems.

Alcoholism is no greater a problem among the homeless than it is in the larger society. Homeless people in Sydney drink about as much alcohol as the Australian population in general. Similarly, homeless people in Toronto drink about as much as the average for the Canadian population.

But, as with other labelling processes, those who are labelled tend to believe the labellers. The red herring of alcoholism consumed a great deal of time and effort at the Station in Sydney. The alcoholism situation is exacerbated by Alcoholics Anonymous, where the labelling process has been adopted by lay people. It is another example of the individualistic approach to homelessness and lack of attention to structural issues.

One of the ways the alcoholism label was fought at the Station was to invite Dr. Margaret Sargent to speak at one of our seminars. Dr. Sargent had recently published *Drinking and Alcoholism in Australia: A Power Relations Theory*. The book adopts a structural analysis of alcohol production and consumption, and of the notion of alcoholism. Dr. Sargent did her best to dispel the notion that most homeless people are alcoholics, emphasizing the fact that the middle and upper classes are responsible for most of Australia's alcohol consumption, although they seldom become homeless. Some saw the point and, over the following weeks, we attempted to reinforce the message, to develop a structural focus, and to reject the alcoholic label. Considerable patience and group effort is required to convince individuals to cast off their labels and free their energies to work on group projects.

The Community Development Approach

The community development approach to improving conditions for the powerless works from a set of assumptions that are entirely different from those used in the professional "expert-led" approach. It assumes that local people are the best judges of what is best for themselves. Community development has a healthy suspicion of the notion of "experts:" the expert is regarded as an outsider with no first-hand knowledge of the particular local situation. By contrast, those who form the community have direct and thorough knowledge of their particular situation.

For the community development worker, the "community" is not always a geographically defined area. It can also be defined as a set of people tied together by their common interest in a particular issue or set of issues. In this sense a particular group of homeless people, and perhaps their allies* also, who share an interest in solving a set of problems, are a community.

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* Allies may be found among the professions from the ranks of graduates of social work departments who have been instructed in community development.

There are a series of definable steps in the community development process. The first step is to clearly identify the problem and agree on a goal that will solve the problem. For example, the problem may be that people are being asked to leave a hostel early in the morning and are then pestered by the police for loitering. Once this problem is identified people may agree that the solution is to keep the hostel open so that residents can come and go as they please (a prerogative of residents in most non-jail situations).

The second step is a learning process while the group increases its level of self-knowledge and knowledge of the environment surrounding the problem. In our example this would entail several discussion sessions. First, group members would have the opportunity to talk about themselves and hear what others had to say. Second, there would be meetings among the hostel group and collaborating organizations and agencies to discuss the nature of each partner and its part in the process. Power relationships between the hostel, its staff and management, and the outside world would be discussed fully. Another element of this step would be to clarify attitudes towards self and others in the group.

The third step moves the group towards formulation of objectives. These objectives are probably best used as signposts along the route towards the final goal, in our case twenty-four hour access to the hostel. Objectives may best be regarded as tactics in a total strategy. The achievement of each objective is vital to reaching the final goal. Objectives are concrete actions such as meeting with a local politician to enlist his or her support for the group's goal. During this step, frequent group meetings are held to check that everyone is still on board and to allow members to relate their experiences of work on particular objectives to the group for discussion and support. Organizing, planning, and administrative skills are developed among group members at appropriate times during this step. For example, the organizer may gradually turn over more of the responsibility for arranging meetings and keeping written records to different members. This step develops further the sense of community in the group.

The fourth step is an evaluation of the effectiveness of the process in solving the problem. All who participated in the process must be involved in this final step.

It is vital that none of the steps outlined above are bypassed in the community development process. A group that uses the community development approach will move forward on an issue only when the whole group is in accord. Taking action without first developing skills and acquiring knowledge about one's self, the group, and the environment, is unlikely to lead to satisfactory outcomes. Community development done properly is an effective combination of education and action. Hayden Roberts, whose book *Community Development: Learning and Action* provides a useful introduction to community development, writes that the approach:

... rests on certain underlying propositions: that people are capable of both perceiving and judging the condition of their lives; that they have the will and capacity to plan together in accordance with these judgements to change that condition for the better: that they can act together in accordance with these plans ...

7

Some Case Studies

The cases discussed in this chapter come from three cities: Toronto, Canada and Brisbane and Sydney in Australia. These are the cities where I have spent the past fourteen years of my life, and where I have worked with the homeless. From discussions with people who work with the homeless in other cities, from readings, and from visits to other cities, I have the impression that homelessness issues in Brisbane, Sydney and Toronto are similar to those in other large centres in the Western world. For this reason I think generalizations can, with some caution, be drawn from the case studies and applied elsewhere.

The case studies provide good illustrations of social service agencies as important catalysts and supporters in empowering the homeless and in managing effective organizing efforts. Several of the cases may already be familiar to the reader owing to their use as examples in other chapters of the book.

On the Streets of Toronto: Organizing for Housing

Metropolitan Toronto, with a population of just over two million, is Canada's largest urban centre, and is often seen to have the largest concentration of homeless. It is fruitless to estimate how many these homeless number but they must almost certainly be in the thousands. The City of Toronto, which forms the central core of the metropolitan area, is the location for most of the services to the homeless. These services have focused typically on providing emergency shelter and meals, part-time jobs, and religious, mainly Christian, proselytizing. There have been attempts to develop drop-in centres where homeless people have a say in their operation, and to a large extent it is these locations that have become the preferred launching points for organizing.

In the early 1970s Keith Whitney, a United Church minister, founded the Single Displaced Persons Project. This was an attempt to get social agency personnel to see homelessness in structural rather than individual terms. Over the next 15 years the Project had a profound influence on the thinking of many social service agencies dealing with homelessness issues in Toronto. Among other objectives, the Project attempted to educate social agency personnel to address homelessness as a structural problem of the socio-economic system, rather than as a problem of particular individuals. This approach is now widely accepted. Certainly, there are still agencies that look at the problem as one of individuals, but the philosophy of the Single Displaced Persons' Project has helped support organizing initiatives among the homeless.

SPACE — SPACE stands for Sharing People and Community Efforts, an organization developed by a group of homeless people fed up with living in hostels. The group took shape over discussions in a drop-in centre located in the All Saints Anglican Church. The core group of about six people requested assistance from several staff members of local agencies that dealt with homelessness issues. The request was not for material aid but for guidance in defining the goals of the group. For several months the agency people met with the group to identify issues that might become goals towards which the group could work. The discussions eventually began to coalesce around the need for affordable and secure housing, a concrete and identifiable need for the entire group. Most of them were spending their nights in local emergency hostels. This meant they were ineligible for welfare payments since a major requirement was to have a permanent address and the hostel address was not valid.

At about this stage of the group's development an agency staff person with links to the Single Displaced Persons' Project was approached by the owner of an apartment building. The owner had problems with high rates of turnover and vandalism in his apartment building, and was looking for a better guarantee of resident stability. The agency staff person asked the SPACE group whether it was interested in negotiating a lease with the landlord for several apartments. The proposal solidifed the group, for here was a solution to members' needs for secure, low-cost accommodation, which would also make them eligible to receive welfare payments, and it dovetailed neatly with the interests of the building owner.

Enough money was found by people linked to the Single Displaced Persons' Project to hire an organizer, Jacques Tremblay, to work with the SPACE group one day a week. He talked to members of the group, in individual and group sessions about their specific plan for the apartments. Tremblay tried to determine what kind of deal they wished to make with the landlord, how many members they believed should move into the building and whether they wanted rules for living in the building. Jacques also discussed the plan with other homeless people at drop-in centres and coffee shops. In a few weeks SPACE grew from six members to about thirty members. The new group began to meet weekly to

discuss their homelessness and to plan the negotiation of a deal with the building owner. Members of the group then began to meet with the owner and after several weeks a deal was struck.

The owner insisted on some kind of guarantee from non-homeless people and/or incorporated organizations in the event that the SPACE group failed to meet the financial obligations of the lease. Through the auspices of the Single Displaced Persons' Project a group of organizations and individuals agreed to act as guarantors. Within a few weeks a final agreement was in place and fourteen SPACE members moved into seven apartments, with an option to inhabit another three apartments in the first year. A one-year lease was signed by SPACE, the landlord, and members of a resource group set up to assist Jacques Tremblay and SPACE.

Jacques Tremblay continued to work periodically with SPACE and the resource group continued to make itself available. The larger SPACE group, including those who did not occupy apartments, continued to meet but members came more and more to be defined as people who occupied an apartment in the building. Individuals began to work part-time and life in the building settled into the typical routine of attempting to oblige the landlord to repair and maintain the building to the standards agreed to in the lease. A major problem developed when ownership of the building changed hands three times within the first year. Each new owner argued about the conditions in the lease with SPACE. As the year drew to a close it became apparent that the lease would not be renewed and SPACE members began to look for alternate accommodation. The non-renewal of the lease effectively ended the organization's existence, although it lasted a few more months as a viable entity. However, its members became important players in the development of other small-scale accommodation initiatives. Three years later several ex-SPACE members continue to provide important leadership to homeless people in Toronto.

Dixon Hall-Cityhome Housing Project — Organizing efforts among the homeless sometimes begin as initiatives of social service agencies.

The seed of the idea for the Dixon Hall-Cityhome housing project was planted in this way, in the harsh winter of 1981-82, when Toronto had an acute shortage of emergency accommodation. At that time I was Executive Director of Dixon Hall, a neighbourhood social services centre in downtown Toronto. A local alderman asked me whether Dixon Hall would be interested in managing a short-term emergency shelter, if the municipal government put up the money. I put the idea to Dixon Hall's board of directors and it was accepted. A public health building was quickly converted into a shelter that could sleep up to 60 homeless men in basic beds on the floor. The emergency shelter was open inside two weeks and did not close until the end of the winter.

That spring, staff at Dixon Hall and at Cityhome, the City of Toronto's public housing corporation, began to discuss the possibility of opening a year-round

emergency shelter. (Apart from the shortage of emergency accommodation, many of the existing men's emergency hostels were operated in too authoritarian a manner: they did not treat homeless men with the dignity they deserved.) Some months later we located a building, arranged camping mattresses on the floor, and opened it in the middle of the 1982-83 winter. The shelter was filled to capacity all winter and ever since, despite the very rudimentary accommodation.

Up to this point the Dixon Hall-Cityhome shelter involved no actual organizing among the homeless. However, from the outset there had been a strong commitment to connect the shelter with some kind of organizing effort: otherwise we would only be applying another band-aid to the overall problem. With the assistance of Jacques Tremblay, a system of long-term housing was developed, in which the emergency shelter functioned as the entry point from the street. The long-term housing system had three components: (i) the emergency shelter as the entry point; (ii) a less spartan shelter for men run by the city (with real beds and a permanent address for receiving welfare payments); and (iii) permanent housing in houses owned by Cityhome, or other housing alternatives in the private or non-profit housing sector.

The shelter was the organizing base. In the early days Jacques Tremblay met with men at the shelter to find out who was interested in moving into permanent housing. Jacques formed a group from these men, and as the group coalesced it would move into the city shelter. Jacques continued to work with the group helping to locate appropriate accommodation for the group to move into. At this stage Jacques would gradually phase himself out of the process. Dixon Hall then hired a full-time person to do the organizing work for accommodation.

Many men who use the emergency shelter are not interested in permanent housing; but those who are interested have the opportunity to work towards this goal with the organizer. In the past three years about 60 men have acquired permanent accommodation through this system.

It is a paradox — though not an uncommon one — that one of the factors that undoubtedly helped create a positive environment for organizing at Dixon Hall was the strong neighbourhood opposition to the shelter's location in its midst. A vocal residents' organization in this lower middle class area saw the shelter as a threat to property values and resident safety. The organization failed, despite several months of trying, to close the shelter, and resigned itself to an uneasy truce. But the conflict had a positive effect on the shelter residents in so far as it developed a sense of community and provoked discussion at meetings about why they were seen as a threat.

Homes First Society's 90 Shuter Street — Homes First Society developed as an offshoot of the Fred Victor Mission, a United Church-sponsored men's hostel in central Toronto (and the home base of Keith Whitney, founder of the Single Displaced Persons' Project). Its first board of directors was made up of members

of the board of the Fred Victor Mission and individuals involved in the Single Displaced Persons' Project. The board of directors shared at least one conviction: the belief that everyone, regardless of income, should have the right to decent housing and security of tenure in a non-institutional setting. It was a conviction born of experience working at hostels such as the Fred Victor Mission.

The first major project of Homes First Society was to build an eleven-storey apartment building to accommodate over 75 people. For those who have spent any time in hostels for the homeless, the 90 Shuter Street building is a great improvement in both its physical layout and in its operation and management. The building contains seventeen apartments shared by four or five people. The opportunities for privacy and individual space are far superior to most hostels. Each person has a private room, shares a bathroom with one other person, and shares a kitchen and living area with three or four others. The most important contrast with hostels is that the residents participate in running the building through their own residents' committee and through membership — with members of the board — on a committee that decides, when necessary, who to evict. Potential new residents are screened for suitability by current residents.

Perhaps the most important feature of the 90 Shuter Street story is the months of organization and preparation that had to be done before anyone moved into the new building in November 1984. The guiding philosophy was to develop groups of people who would be willing to live together in the shared apartment setting of 90 Shuter Street. Jacques Tremblay helped organize men's groups at the Dixon Hall emergency shelter and at the All Saints drop-in centres. Alison Guyton worked with agencies that provided services to homeless women to form groups of women. Homes First Society members believed that 90 Shuter Street could be a non-institutional setting only if a sense of community were created among potential occupants before moving into the building. Now, four years after the building first opened, it has become a model for non-institutional accommodation for the homeless in Canada.

Brisbane and Sydney: Organizing from Drop-Ins

I arrived in Brisbane — a city of about a million people and state capital of Queensland — in 1974 all fired up with ideas about organizing the homeless. I had just completed a doctorate at an American university on the topic of homelessness. In my research on skid rows across the United States and Canada I had been particularly impressed with the organizing efforts of two drop-in centres in the United States, the First Avenue Service Centre in Seattle and the Single Men's Self-Help Centre in Sacramento. What struck me most about these two centres was how sharply they stood out from the almost unrelieved wilderness of paternalism, charity and authoritarianism of other agencies working with the homeless. In Seattle and Sacramento there was at least some recognition that

homeless people were thinking, worthwhile human beings who, given half a chance, could make sensible decisions about how to lead their lives.

Arriving in Brisbane, I sensed that there was a favourable political climate for work on homelessness. At that point in 1974 the Australian government was about to pass the Homeless Persons Assistance Act, which was born of the report of the Working Party on Homeless Men and Women, published in 1973. At roughly the same time, a group of people from different social service agencies formed the Brisbane Committee on Homeless Persons. I joined the committee and began enlisting support for a drop-in centre similar to the First Avenue Service Centre and the Sacramento Single Men's Self-Help Centre. Several committee members supported in principle my proposal. One of those members informed me that a local Alcoholics Anonymous group, which included several homeless participants, was looking for a location downtown for holding meetings.

In this way I met Arthur Hunt, a man in his early sixties who was to become an important partner in the drop-in centre project. He had many years' experience of life on the road and in the hostels of urban Australia. When I met him he lived with his wife Nell in a modest weatherboard cottage in north Brisbane. Arthur was a central figure in a well-knit group of Brisbane "street characters" (for want of a better term). Arthur Hunt and I pounded the streets of Brisbane looking for a place to set up our "do drop in," as Arthur called it. After searching for several weeks with the help of two other street people, Radar Ron and Ipswich Tommy, we found an ideal location close to the city centre and the major hostels. It was a 19th-century building at 139 Charlotte Street with a large hall-like room at street level, an old kitchen, a toilet, and one smaller room. The hall would require a couple of thousand dollars of renovations but the rent was cheap.

Arthur, Radar and I prepared a funding proposal to cover the costs of renovations and rent for the first year. We had already cultivated a sympathetic contact, an ex-footballer, at the Department of Social Security. He not only supported our written submission, but he liked the idea so much that he helped voluntarily with the renovations. Few public servants are this keen about projects for the homeless: when one appears, he or she should be cultivated.

In September, 1975 the drop-in centre, called the "139 Club," opened its doors. Arthur, Radar and I, in discussions with other people from the Committee on Homeless Persons, had decided against having paid staff people at the 139 Club for two reasons. First we wanted it to be run by and for the homeless; and second we had little hope of finding funding for support staff.

So the Club was managed by its users. A house committee, formed of myself (president), Arthur (secretary), Radar Ron, and a number of homeless people, met once a week to discuss issues as they arose and to develop policy. Our meetings were unorthodox but fruitful, covering mundane decisions over who should have keys and larger questions such as whether our goal was to provide

a specific service or to develop a coherent voice for the homeless in Brisbane. The group decided to address both goals, providing services such as free lunches, information on part-time jobs and accommodation, and health services. At the same time club members spread the message, through the media, that affordable housing was being depleted rapidly through the process of urban renewal.

Within six months the 139 Club had to defend its very existence, which became the Club's major concern. Opposition to the Club came from the wholesaling businesses that occupied most of the other premises on the street. We had chosen the street because it was not a retail shopping area and thus we could see no reason for local businesses to regard our presence as a disadvantage in attracting potential customers. But this in fact was the complaint of the local wholesalers.

Our weekly meetings came to be given over entirely to discussions about how to convince the wholesalers that the 139 Club posed no threat. We recruited individuals to visit local businesses on public relations missions intended to allay fears. But we were only slightly successful. A wholesaler's group formed, and pressured the owner of the building to attempt to evict the Club as a tenant on the grounds that the club represented a fire hazard (there were many smokers among the club members). A court battle ensued, ending with the eviction of the Club in September, 1977 after being in existence for just two years. But the community opposition, if it did nothing else, helped build a sense of community among homeless people at the 139 Club. The Club continued to exist as a group, but without a place to call home. A year later, after considerable negotiating with the federal government under the Homeless Person's Assistance Act, the Club found a new home. The club continues to this day, staffed now, albeit with a staff some distance removed from its philosophy of management by the homeless, but it is still at the forefront of innovative projects with the homeless in Brisbane.

Sydney's Station — The Station grew out of a small-scale housing initiative for the homeless that accommodated eight men in a building (used formerly as a police station and lock up) near the centre of Sydney, Australia's largest city. We began to reconsider the value and appropriateness of the housing project after several violent incidents that we attributed to a lack of organizational continuity (which might have been provided by a paid staff person). The project also appeared to us unlikely to have much effect on the wider, systemic backdrop to homelessness. We settled on a new approach that would combine a daytime drop-in and information centre.

Our organizing group was formed of social science academics, staff of social service agencies, and homeless people who saw a need for the homeless to take more control of their lives. The founders shared a perspective of homelessness as a structural problem and, unlike many local social service agencies, wished to address homelessness in the context of problems in the wider socio-economic system.

I was proposed as a candidate for the staff position at the Station, an idea that appealed to me since I already had a strong commitment to making the Station work. (It also allowed me to leave my position as a sociology lecturer at the University of New South Wales, where my approach to social issues was becoming, in my own eyes, too theoretical: a front-line position might put me back in contact with the practical reality of homelessness.)

I was assisted in setting up the Station by a co-worker we hired, Nikki Williams, a woman with strong experience in poverty issues and a commitment to developing organizing initiatives among the homeless. The purpose we saw for the Station was as a location from which organizing activities could begin. Nikki and I believed our role to be to provide a comfortable, propitious, and non-institutional environment for these initiatives and to act as resource people. Physically the Station is one large upstairs room with a small office and several smaller rooms on the ground floor. Most of these smaller rooms had served as cells and they still had bars on the windows. We painted, decorated, and furnished the large upstairs room to a comfortable standard: it was our meeting place and information room.

Apart from providing a pleasant physical environment, we wanted to allow our clientele opportunities for self and group expression, provoke questions and criticism of individualist models of homelessness, and provide some basic services to help make life on the streets somewhat more bearable.

Opportunities for self and group expression included the newsletter *The Ticket*, Radio Skid Row (both discussed in Chapter 5), and an information system run by the homeless. The last project involved the use of notice boards, weekly bull sessions, and seminars featuring guest speakers. These activities gave Station users a wide range of opportunities through which to express themselves and develop certain skills.

The weekly bull sessions dealt with items from housekeeping and laundry to larger issues, such as problems with particular squatting locations. What follows is a typical set of minutes:

> 1. Friction between older and younger Station users
>
> Peter, Ian and Warren gave a full account of a new drop-in centre which opened in Kings Cross last night. A number of Station users were impressed with the centre as it offers tea, coffee and sandwiches free of charge. Donations, of course, would be welcome as the centre is not funded.
>
> Tensions at the Station seemed to have eased now that a drop-in centre is open all night to people of all ages. (Another all night drop-in centre had catered previously to young people only.)

2. Guest Speakers

The next guest speaker will be Tim Moore, the state Liberal Party shadow minister for Youth and Community Services. Mr. Moore will be speaking at 9.30 a.m. on the 14th of April. Vernon asked that the question of a wait of six months after getting on the dole before being eligible for free glasses should be put to Mr. Moore.

It was suggested that Mr. Rob Tickner, the City Alderman, should be invited as a future guest speaker.

It was also suggested that the Minister for Social Security, Ms. Margaret Guilfoyle, should be invited. It was also suggested that Mr. Rex Jackson, the Minister for Youth and Community Services should be invited.

3. High rents for poor accommodation

Duncan raised the problem of high rents in low class hotels around town. What can be done about it? Suggestions were made that the only way that anything can be done is through large groups of people getting together and acting as groups. Boycotts of certain cheap hotels might be an effective way of bringing down rents or pressuring the State into doing something about the bad housing situation.

4. Counter staff at Social Security

There were several complaints about the "grey haired lady" at the counter at 117 Clarence Street. It was suggested that we find out her name and make an official complaint about her treatment of clients.

5. Jim Warnock on remand

Bob informed everybody that Jim Warnock is on remand at Long Bay. He needs $200 for bail. Anyone interested in helping should let Bob or Paul know, or visit Jim at Long Bay.

6. Washing Machine

Since the old washing machine packed it in, another machine has been installed. This machine requires ten cents in the slot. It's just a case of putting the ten cents in then putting a cup of washing powder into the centre cylinder. Put your washing in, close the lid and that's it! (Oh yes, if you think there isn't enough water in there when you put the washing in then you can add a bucketful out of the cold water tap out in the yard. It doesn't fill as high as it should because the water pressure is pretty low.)

7. Next Outing

There will be an outing to Nielsen Park on the 20th of February. The minibus will leave the Station at 9 a.m. and will be back by 3 p.m. The cost will be $1.50 each.

The seminars brought a wide range of guest speakers to discuss issues with groups of up to 40 Station users. What follows is an article from *The Ticket* describing one of these sessions:

On the 3rd of October we were pleased to welcome Dr. Tony Vinson, Chairman of the Corrective Services Commission, as our guest. Dr. Vinson, fresh from an overseas study trip, spoke enthusiastically of the prison reforms that have recently taken place in Europe. He was particularly interested by developments in Holland and the United Kingdom. He felt that what he had seen overseas had demonstrated to him that he and those who support him are on the right track in attempting to make the New South Wales prisons system more humanitarian and more responsive to the changing needs of the 20th Century. Dr. Vinson said that the major issue in the current round of industrial strife in New South Wales prisons is the conflict between two competing sets of values. On the one hand there are those that believe in the importance of maintaining the old authoritarian attitudes towards prisons and prisoners and on the other hand there are those who believe that New South Wales prisons should be dragged into the 20th century with more humanitarian approaches to prisons and prisoners.

Dr. Vinson said one of his major disappointments had been the lack of public interest in the initiatives that he and his supporters had fought for.

All those present expressed appreciation of the fact that Dr. Vinson had taken time out of a very busy schedule to be present at one of the Station's most informative and enjoyable seminars.

The bull sessions and the guest speaker sessions at the Station were important in strengthening group solidarity and raising awareness: it was a critical stage in forming a good base for serious organizing. When actual organizing began, it addressed particular issues such as alternatives to bug-ridden accommodation, setting up groups to occupy squats, and making the social welfare system more responsive to the needs of the homeless.

The Station continued to offer these kinds of activities until late 1984 when together with many surrounding buildings, it was badly damaged in a fire. Another temporary location was found near the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and in 1986 the Station moved back to its former — now restored — location. In recent years a food cooperative has been added to the activities and, somewhat in the

manner of the Dixon Hall Shelter, it is being used as an entry point for long-term housing. The Station, like the 139 Club in Brisbane, continues to be in the forefront of organizing efforts among the homeless.

Conclusion: Issues and Lessons

The last part of this chapter will examine several issues and lessons that arise from the case studies and from other experiences of organizing among the homeless.

The Class Background of Organizers — There is some question among those who work with the homeless whether organizers of middle class backgrounds are an essential catalyst of organizing efforts. The organizing efforts discussed earlier in Australia and Canada were all initiated, wholly or in part, by organizers with middle class backgrounds. On the other hand, organizers of Marxist orientation argue that the middle class actually comes between the poor and the working class in efforts to organize the poor (see, for example, Marjaleena Repo's article "Organizing the poor against the working class"). The argument is that the "poor" as a distinct group, is a creation of the upper class, and one which the middle class tries to maintain and keep from connecting with the working class. From this perspective the working class is seen as an organizable entity with a set of values different from those of the poor: the poor are Marx's "lumpenproletariat," the people outside the system and irrelevant to the functioning of capitalism. Organizing efforts should therefore be concentrated on working class people who must scramble to survive — i.e., the so-called working poor.

My rebuttal to the Marxist argument is as follows: I agree that the category of "the poor" represents a false notion of these people as somehow different and outside the system. In my view the poor are actually a part of the working class, albeit the bottom end of the working class. To define the working class simply as those who currently work is nonsense. The working class is formed of people who have only their labour to sell to survive. During hard times it may become necessary to supplement work in order to survive by accepting welfare and other forms of charity.

In my view the real questions to be asked about class background and organizing are: Why is there not more working class input as catalyst? Is it necessarily harmful for the middle class to act as catalyst?

In Chapter 3 we looked at the history of efforts to connect the issue of homelessness with organized labour. There have been few examples of this occurring (although, as I pointed out, the increasing tendency for social service agencies to unionize may create more opportunities for linkages to occur). Some people say that organized labour will involve itself in the problem when it begins to affect its members more directly. I think it would be unlikely that union members will

be affected greatly by homelessness: the general pattern of homelessness is that by the time a union member becomes homeless, he or she will at some stage have ceased to be a union member. In any case organized labour does not constitute the entire labour force. In 1985, 55 per cent of the labour force in Australia was unionized, only 31 per cent was unionized in Canada, and the figure was lower yet in the United States. Much of the working class is not organized and those who are homeless form a part of this unorganized working class. As far as organizing goes, the problem is that the organized working class is not aware that it belongs to the same class as the unorganized, and it is thus not particularly concerned about their living conditions or their potential as allies.

Does this leave the initiation of organizing efforts to concerned members of the middle class? I believe it may be more useful to ask questions such as: Will the effort eventually give the homeless more power over their own lives? Or will it eventually develop into another component of the homeless industry, further ensuring that the homeless remain dependent clients of middle class organizations? The case studies in this chapter seem to me to be examples of initiatives that began with middle class input and were ultimately beneficial and empowering for the homeless people involved.

Segregation vs. Integration of Homeless Women and Men — Among the case studies discussed earlier, Dixon Hall, the 139 Club and the Station were largely male organizing efforts; Homes First's 90 Shuter Street and the SPACE group were integrated. Although I do not discuss women's refuge-based organizing examples, since I have not been directly involved in such work, they too are likely to be segregated by sex.

It is my opinion that sex-segregated organizing efforts sacrifice considerable potential. Single-sex organizing does not question the status quo of the sex segregation practiced by many social service agencies. Second it means that neither sex can benefit from the skills of the other. For example, men are denied the opportunity to learn the lessons of cooperative effort that their sisters seem to have learned so well. In my work at the Station I witnessed several small group organizing efforts, some of these were all male and some were integrated: the integrated efforts seemed to hold together more effectively, particularly in the case of squats.

Men may benefit from having female collaboration but do women benefit? This question is complicated by the fact that men are almost invariably the most immediate cause of women's homelessness. The benefit for women in an integrated effort may come in the opportunity to see beyond men as the problem, in the examination of wider structural forces. But this is likely to be too abstract a possibility at the outset. Organizers must examine closely the potential benefits of sex-integrated group organizing.

Pros and Cons of Paid Staff — On the question of whether to have paid staff, Si Kahn (1982:71) writes:

> Like so many of the organizational decisions that we face, there are no easy answers to the problems of staff. However, if we develop a good system of accountability, some fairly strict definitions of what we're looking for in our staff, a good recruitment policy, and a long-range training program designed to build skills in both staff and leaders, we will have taken solid steps in the direction of solving some of these problems.

Paid staff can help an organization hang together after the early heady days of success. If the organization has ongoing goals, then it may make sense to hire someone to ensure organizational continuity. Some groups are established only to solve a particular problem: in these cases there is no reason to continue the organization, so the question of paid staff becomes a non-issue.

There is a danger posed by paid staff within organizations that are intended to empower powerless people: the paid staff can in effect take over the organization. This is where accountability to the group membership has to be incorporated carefully. Certain members of the group must be charged with ensuring that the staff respects decisions made by the group. (An earlier step would be to ensure that group decision-making processes are in place.) Paid staff should only carry out the actions that are implied by group decisions.

In the case of the 139 Club, the fight against eviction and the subsequent relocation was carried out by the group, also without staff. SPACE had a part-time organizer who assisted with the tenancy negotiations and with the process of settling in. Paid staff was not necessary to maintain an ongoing effort. At Homes First, Dixon Hall and the Station, staff were hired to launch the projects after which group members were encouraged gradually to assume more of the responsibilities.

In some cases group members become paid employees. This happened to a limited extent in the Homes First 90 Shuter Street Project. This can present a certain danger, especially in all male situations, of an authoritarian streak manifesting itself in the putting down of one's former fellow group members. In this, as in all situations, an effective system of accountability to the group is essential.

Neighbourhood Opposition — Neighbourhood opposition to projects for the homeless can be turned into a positive force. For example, opposition to the 139 Club turned out to be a boon when we pitched our case to the media. Employers in the area claimed that the safety of their female employees was threatened by the presence of homeless men in the vicinity. They also claimed that the club and its members discouraged potential customers from entering the area. It all helped to strengthen solidarity among club members: this solidarity helped to sustain the organization during its long period without a home.

Similar claims were made against the Dixon Hall emergency shelter. A coalition of local business people, residents and developers argued that the shelter was a threat to personal safety, property values, and potential customers. To allay some of these fears a community "shelter monitoring committee" was set up. It included local business people, residents, a policeman who walked a local beat, a local alderman, a city employee, and a staff member from Dixon Hall. Meetings were open to allow local residents and other interested people to hear the discussions. This situation polarized shelter residents and their outside opponents, which was useful in so far as shelter residents felt themselves to be under siege. They were kept updated either by attending the community meetings or by learning of new developments at the monthly shelter meetings organized by a resident. In a paradoxical way, this "us and them" atmosphere provided a positive environment for organizing groups. If it does nothing else, neighbourhood opposition helps to extend world views beyond "me versus the world" to "us versus the world."

Amenable Environments — Organizing efforts must be flexible and opportunistic enough to take advantage of amenable environments. Brisbane in 1974 was a highly amenable place for innovations, although the city historically had a very traditional and authoritarian approach to homelessness. The difference was in the coincidence of the Homeless Persons Act of 1974, the presence of collaborators like Arthur Hunt (and his friends Radar Ron and Ipswich Tommy), and the assistance of our sympathetic contact inside the Department of Social Security. These conditions all conspired to provide an amenable environment for the 139 Club. It may not have happened a year earlier or a year later.

Participants in Homes First Society's 90 Shuter Street Project say that their success in securing funding for the building, and in arranging organizational and staff support could only have occurred at that point in history. These experiences show that organizers need to know when the planets are lined up correctly so that they can take advantage of good conditions.

Drop-ins vs. "Rot-ins" — Drop-ins have had their ups and downs over the years. (In the late 1960s and early 1970s they were seen in a rather simple-minded way as a panacea for street problems, particularly young people's problems.) From my perspective there are drop-ins and rot-ins, two quite different establishments. In a drop-in a particular group can feel at home and unthreatened. More importantly a drop-in can become an ideal location for organizing when it fosters a sense of group solidarity, and develops resources for dealing with the larger world. The Station and the 139 Club belong to this category of drop-ins. Things are happening there, questions are being asked, and minds are opening to new and more effective ways of looking at the world.

By contrast, what I call rot-ins are simply places to escape the cold or rain and, perhaps, the police, but where nothing of substance happens. It is true that they may be part of the informal communication system, which is positive, but a drop-

in should be a solid base of operations for organizing. Organizers should support initiatives for developing drop-ins and oppose proposals that appear to match my definition of rot-ins. A simple way to distinguish drop-ins from rot-ins is in staff attitudes: if the staff tend to encourage organizing, then it is a drop-in. If they tend to discourage it, then it is a rot-in. If there are no staff at all, it is more likely to be a drop-in.

8

Concluding Remarks

Now that you've persevered this far with the book, you've had the full benefit of my limited wisdom on organizing the homeless. I don't claim to be an expert, but I have spent a few years in and around the homelessness scene and I hope what I've learned will be of some help to you. Some of what I've written in the book may appear to be only remotely related to organizing the homeless but I believe that this apparently unrelated material is essential to understand the society around us. Unless we get a good grasp on that society, it's impossible to know where and how homelessness fits in. If, for example, we understand that the presence of homelessness benefits some sectors of society, we deal with those sectors differently than we would with those sectors that would benefit by decreasing homelessness.

At the risk of being repetitious, I want to finish up by stressing again some of those things I see as most important for good organizing. Perhaps I can call them something presumptuous like the 14 commandments of organizing among the homeless?

1. Keep reminding yourself that homelessness is a structural problem, not an individual problem.

There will be lots of occasions when those pushing the individualistic model will appear to be right: when people don't turn up to meetings as they said they would; when a homeless person argues vehemently that he is to blame because he could have worked harder at school; when heated arguments break out over who should take responsibility for making sure the rent is paid at the end of the month. But you've got to keep extending your thinking beyond that immediate aggravating situation. You've got to be able to see the forest beyond the trees.

You need to remember some of the arguments about inequality in society, even those that clash with your most strongly held beliefs. You need to remember and understand them so that you can argue effectively against them. And that doesn't just mean arguing with the people you come into contact with in your work role; it also means mounting reasonable arguments with people you meet in your social life. You need to feel a strong justification for what you do, not as some hairbrained ideologue, but as someone who is well-informed and reasonable. This way you stay sane about what you do for a living as well as proud about it and you may even win some converts to your way of thinking.

2. Remember the importance of combining theory and practice.

Theory without practice is academic indulgence and practice without theory is uninformed and undirected activity. I've tried to show the ways in which social theory is relevant to practice both by having a separate chapter on social theory and by attempting to relate some of the practical side of the work to theory. I don't argue for the correctness of one particular theory over others and this is by design. My main purpose has been to demonstrate that social theory has an important place in the thinking and work of organizers. Social theory helps us to stand back from the day-to-day organizer's existence that appears to move jerkily from one crisis to another so that we begin to recognize patterns and we begin to fit those apparently unique crises into a broader framework. I recognize that many organizers think that time spent attempting to come to grips with social theories is time wasted. Believe me, it is not. Social theory needs to be liberated from the college classrooms and textbooks and put to work on the streets.

3. Keep your projects small and ensure that they're followed through.

Mass-based organizing with the homeless is doomed to failure before it even begins. We're not interested in earth shattering movements. They take up too much time. They tend to be long on talk and short on action. Small and important gains can be made through organizing around local, tangible and "do-able" projects. The kinds of projects written about in this book are the small-scale, tangible kinds of projects. Such projects have a finite time line and, as such, people who are not sure where the next meal is coming from or where they'll be sleeping next week can identify with them.

4. Work carefully with professionals: know the difference between traditional professionals and enlightened professionals.

Although this book has been somewhat critical of professionals in the area of homelessness, there are many enlightened professionals with useful skills who can be recruited in the fight against homelessness. As in working with any group as an organizer, it makes little sense to stereotype and see all professionals as "the enemy." However it is essential to look to community development approaches as effective alternatives to traditional professional approaches. Traditional pro-

fessionals work with patients and clients; enlightened professionals and organizers work with people.

5. Be suspicious of anyone who talks about rehabilitating the homeless.

Rehabilitation is a euphemism for total control of the powerless. It is a term that has little use in the lexicon of an organizer. The whole notion of rehabilitation works to move the focus away from the problems within the socio-economic structure and towards the individual as the main problem. It then leads to attempts to change the individual rather than the structural factors that impinge upon him or her. Talk of rehabilitation is something that can be used to distinguish the traditional from the enlightened professional.

6. Shun charity, paternalism and messianic approaches.

You've really got to examine your motives closely. You've got to ask yourself why it is you want to work organizing people down at the bottom end of the system. Is it because you feel sorry for them? Is it because you think they aren't going to be able to make it without your help and the help of those like you? Is it because you alone know the way, nobody else does, not even the homeless themselves? An affirmative answer to any of these questions may well mean that you're not really the right person to be doing this kind of work.

7. Be patient, take the time to listen.

Much of what good organizing is about is patience. Listen to what people have to say. Be willing to give the process time to work. When it's the nitty gritty of getting people out to meetings and getting the meetings to work properly, it's patience that counts. You can't be rushing hither and thither, looking at your watch, thinking about deadlines and still be effective. Slow down, have that extra cup of coffee and give people the opportunity to get to know you and you them. Taking the time to listen gives people strong messages. You saying you care doesn't mean nearly as much as showing you care by taking the time.

8. Be fully aware of your own class background and how this affects your attitude to the world as a whole and to the homeless in particular.

If you're middle class, and the majority of organizers probably are, it means you've got a lot of learning to do. You've got to learn to understand that what's important to you may not be nearly so important to the people you're working with. You've got to learn to be comfortable with what may be entirely new values to you and you've got to be able to honestly see them as worthwhile values. The real test is to be able to accept the new values without appearing to be condescending. All homeless people are not striving to become middle class!

9. Remember to laugh.

There's nothing more boring or uninspiring than an organizer who is always serious. People who take themselves too seriously are also pretty ineffective as organizers. No one wants to be around them, much less come out to spend time in a meeting with them. Being able to see the funny side in what you do helps you to remain sane too and it means you've got a better chance of hanging on to those friends of yours who work in totally different areas. Coming to a party of your friends with the cares of the world on your shoulders is likely to reduce the number of invitations drastically.

10. Be willing to let go when the time comes.

An organizer who doesn't know when it's time to "bug out" is on the way to becoming a politician. Organizers who stick around too long are likely to build dependency relationships. This may be rewarding in some way to the organizer, making him or her feel needed and essential, but it isn't good organizing. That's why it's so important for organizers to have the need to be wanted fulfilled outside their organizing work.

11. Be aware of the subtleties of language when you're communicating across class lines.

If you're a middle class organizer you've got to understand the basic differences between working class and middle class use of language. There's no unbridgeable language chasm, but being aware of the differences that do exist can help avoid of a lot of misunderstandings. Sports is probably one of the best cross-class topics for shared language use. Being up on the latest sports developments is a good way to enter conversations and a good starting point for discussions on other topics more directly relevant to the organizing task.

12. Learn to work with the inherent conservatism of the homeless.

Don't be overly critical of conservative stances. Instead, learn to work around them. Understand that underneath much overt conservatism there's a lot of creative radicalism which you should learn to tap into. Understand also that under that conservatism is often a lot of fear and confusion. The worst thing you can do is to condemn it outright.

13. Use the talent and abilities that are there to the fullest.

Have homeless people use their abilities as much as possible. Develop your own media, do your own research, make claims on the system by using those talents. Don't be shy to use "the con" when you have good "con artists" around you. When you need money, expand the panhandling abilities that are there. For more ambitious community economic development projects get a good sense of the interests, potential and skills that are present.

14. Help the homeless to understand and embrace their history.

There's lots of history, from the local struggles for housing and jobs, to the more distant struggles of the homeless and powerless in other cities and countries. Look at some of the projects that have worked and are still working immediately around you and elsewhere. Use the information of these projects for discussion with your own groups. Nothing builds group confidence more effectively than knowledge that others just like them were successful in reaching a goal.

Organizing among the homeless can be a thankless, frustrating and wearying task. A favourite organizer friend of mine only stays sane by spending as much time fishing as he does organizing. But that same friend also gets a real kick out of seeing the results of his organizing work. He knows also that it's vital work. Like most of those in his field he doesn't think he can make a lifetime career out of it. But he's damn sure that while he's doing it he's making a difference and every time he moves on he leaves something behind him — a group of homeless people that now know that they too can make a difference.

I only hope this book helps to make the job a little less thankless, frustrating and wearying. Good luck!

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Organizing for the Homeless

Jim Ward

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A former housing-project director, organizer, teacher and sometimes-homeless person himself, Ward brings two decades of hard-won experience to bear in this thoughtful and thorough guide to organizing homeless people.

A comprehensive mix of the practical — *The world of the homeless is governed by time: time to leave the hostel, time for a meal, time to go to the welfare office...when meetings drag on pointlessly, it is unlikely the homeless will risk wasting their time again* — and the theoretical — *It is with trepidation that I say anything about Marx's social theories... nevertheless, they are of considerable importance to anyone involved in organizing the homeless* — the book serves as an invaluable reference work for both the front-line organizer and the social service community at large.

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